

Faculty of Theology  
University of Helsinki

# **THE FATE OF THE NATIONS IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

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DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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## Abstract

*The Fate of the Nations* is an exegetical study attempting to resolve the seemingly incompatible fates of the nations in Revelation. At first, John describes the nations as being destroyed in battle (Rev. 19:11-21; 20:7-10) whereas later he portrays them on the new earth bringing their honour and glory to God (Rev. 21:24-26).

An analysis of the battle in Rev. 19:11-21 demonstrates that the nations are indeed destroyed. John constructs his narratives by borrowing mainly Hebrew Bible imagery that was already militant in its nature and intensifies it. John also universalizes the effects of the battle. After the battle, the earth is left desolate as a vast battlefield full of unburied corpses. The image of a deserted earth, left in an orderless, chaotic state is supported by John's understanding that the redeemed have been moved to heaven as the bride of the Lamb.

With his armies obliterated, his chief allies—the false prophet and the beast—thrown into the lake of fire, Satan is left alone on the devastated earth. Satan's confinement on the desolate earth is his binding, which takes place at the beginning of the millennium. Satan is unable to deceive the nations during the millennium precisely because all the wicked nations have been killed. The nations cannot repent during the millennium because they are dead.

At the end of the millennium a resurrection takes place that repopulates the earth. Satan once again has subjects to deceive and therefore his imprisonment ends. Satan and his followers surround the beloved city that descends from heaven but are devoured by fire from heaven. The event is repeated by John as a judgement scene in Rev. 20:11-15. In both accounts, no calls for repentance are issued for the nations, no change of heart is recorded, and the outcome is only negative portrayals of judgement. The most prominent imagery of judgement appears to be the lake of fire. This term, representing the final, irreversible fate of the wicked, as well as the expression second death, has its roots in Egyptian mythology and the Book of the Dead in particular. Once again, no opportunities for repentance are given to the nations. The theory that somehow the nations repented during the millennium cannot be supported from John's text.

On the new earth, John transforms his symbols and the nations are no longer a symbol of God's enemies but rather a symbol of the believers. Specific rewards that elsewhere in Revelation are promised to the believers, such as access to the tree of life (Rev. 2:7) and admittance into the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:14), are given to the nations on the new earth (Rev. 22:2; 21:24-26). In addition, on the new earth John calls the believers God's peoples (Rev. 21:3) rather than people, thus underscoring their ethnic diversity. The nations' pilgrimage to the temple is an image of worship and evidence of their uninhibited access to God. Those who were excluded from worshipping in the temple or faced persecution in the synagogues on account of being gentiles in the old world can enter the new Jerusalem to offer their glory and honour to God freely on the new earth.

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Most of all, I would like to thank God. Without faith in him I could have never believed that I would accomplish such a great task. It is my hope and prayer that the knowledge from this research will somehow further God's kingdom.

ἔσται τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου τοῦ μεγάλου εὐλογημένον εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα  
ὅτι ἡ σοφία καὶ ἡ μεγαλωσύνη αὐτοῦ ἐστὶ ...  
διδούς σοφοῖς σοφίαν  
καὶ σύνεσιν τοῖς ἐν ἐπιστήμῃ οὖσιν  
*Dan. 2:20-21*

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## Abbreviations

### Abbreviations of ancient literary sources.

1 <i>Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
1-2-3 <i>En.</i>	<i>1-2-3 Enoch</i>
1-2-3-4 <i>Macc.</i>	<i>1-2-3-4 Maccabees</i>
2 <i>Bar.</i>	<i>Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch</i>
4 <i>Ezra</i>	<i>4 Ezra</i>
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<i>Apoc. Paul</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i>
<i>Apoc. Peter</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Peter</i>
<i>Bell. civ.</i>	<i>Bellum civile</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De Confusione linguarum</i>
<i>De Facie</i>	<i>De facie in orbe lunae</i>
<i>De Iside</i>	<i>De Iside et Osiride</i>
<i>De mort.</i>	<i>De Morte Peregrini</i>
<i>Descr.</i>	<i>Graeciae descriptio</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>
FT	Fragment Targum
<i>Gen. Socr.</i>	<i>De Genio Socratis (On the Sign of Socrates)</i>
HB	Hebrew Bible
Hdt.	Herodotus, <i>The Histories</i>
Ir.Bd.	Iranian Bundahišn
Jub.	Jubilees
<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssey</i>
<i>Plin. Ep.</i>	<i>Pliny Epistulae</i>
<i>Ps. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
<i>Rom. Hist.</i>	<i>Roman History</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Moses</i>	<i>Testament of Moses</i>
<i>Tg.</i>	Targum
<i>Tg. Ps-J</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
Yt. 13	Farvardin Yasht
Yt. 19	Zamyad Yasht
Wis.	Wisdom of Solomon



### **Abbreviations of Dictionaries, Encyclopaedias and Bibles.**

ESV	English Standard Version
HALOT	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> , Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, 2 Vols. Unabridged Edition (Leiden: Brill, 2001)
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , edited by G. W. Bromiley et al., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-88)
KJV	King James Version
LSJ	H.G. Liddell R. Scott, H. S. Jones, and R. McKenzie, <i>A Greek English Lexicon</i> , 9 <sup>th</sup> ed.
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; translated and edited by G. W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76)
UBS <sup>3</sup>	The Greek New Testament, 3d corrected ed., edited by K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, and A. Wikgren (New York: United Bible Societies, 1983)

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 The problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the two separate and seemingly incompatible fortunes outlined for the nations in Revelation. On the one hand, the nations are nearly always portrayed as evil and destined for destruction. This image culminates in Rev. 19:11-21 where the forces of the nations, led by the kings of the earth, are slaughtered and their flesh becomes food for the birds of prey. The bleak image of annihilation and destruction is reiterated and reinforced in the next chapter where the nations are consumed by fire and the fate of the wicked is described in terms of perishing in the lake of fire and suffering the second death. On the other hand, in Rev. 21 the nations are welcomed into the new Jerusalem. The problem is further aggravated because the nations are accompanied by the kings of the earth. Can they be the same kings who earlier in Revelation have been consistently evil and allied with the beast and its forces against the Lamb?

Some have suggested that the nations in Rev. 21 and 22 refer to those gentiles who have been redeemed out of the nations throughout the church's history (Rev. 5:9; 7:9). Beale, for example, claims that the kings and nations of Rev. 21:24 are likely to "include some who have persecuted God's people...If so, they have repented and will be allowed entrance to the city. 'Nations' is sometimes used of the company of the redeemed, and those mentioned here are presumably the same group".<sup>1</sup> For Beale, redemption and judgement occurs when Christ returns (Rev. 20:10-15; 22:12-15). Thus, the point of the imagery of the nations marching to the new Jerusalem is to show that the "gentiles will never be separated from open, eternal access to God's presence and nothing evil can threaten such access."<sup>2</sup> A slight variant of this view will be adopted in this study.

Others envision a mass conversion of the nations and a "hope of universalism" by John. For instance, while Barclay admits the notion within Judaism of expecting the complete annihilation of the gentiles, he points out that multiple voices expected a time when "all men

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<sup>1</sup> G. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1097.

<sup>2</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1099. Kiddle also considers the nations to be the redeemed gentiles and he makes the point that they "belong spiritually but not racially to the twelve tribes." Martin Kiddle and M. K. Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, The Moffat New Testament Commentary (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1940), 439; Austin Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John Divine*, Reprint edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 221; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 602.

shall know and love God”.<sup>3</sup> He features references from both canonical and non-canonical books of the intertestamental period to show that John was “foretelling the consummation of a hope which was always in the hearts of the greatest of his countrymen.”<sup>4</sup>

Rissi also takes this approach in stating that the nations and the kings of the earth are those who are outside Jerusalem and have been confined to the lake of fire. Using the imagery of the pilgrimage of the nations from Isaiah 60, Rissi then understands John in Rev. 21:25 as visualizing the nations proceeding and entering the new Jerusalem through its permanently open gates.<sup>5</sup> The same idea is also proposed by Vogelgesang, who attempts to balance the discrepancy between the holiness of Jerusalem and its universality. Both Rissi and Vogelgesang take the judgement language of John seriously but suppose that John boldly envisions a conversion and transformation of those who have previously experienced final judgement.<sup>6</sup> These commentators share the view that the nations who enter the new Jerusalem are those who were previously killed in the battle or were thrown into the lake of fire.

The positive aspect of this theory is that it maintains a consistent use of the term “nations” throughout Revelation.<sup>7</sup> There are, however, some serious problems. The universal nature of the battles in Rev. 19:11-21; 20:7-9 and the fate in the lake of fire, characterized as the second death by John, do not seem to leave open the possibility of salvation. In fact, there is no evidence that any offer for repentance is extended to the nations during or after the millennium. While the theory provides a more consistent usage of the term nations, it presupposes substantial gaps in the narrative told in the book of Revelation. Finally, Herms has maintained universal salvation makes no sense in Revelation in the face of the frequent exhortations to the believers to remain faithful (Rev. 2:4-5, 10, 14-16, 24-25; 3:2-3, 11-12, 18-19; 13:9-10, 18; 14:12; 16:15; 18:4) even among descriptions of the new Jerusalem (21:7-8, 27; 22:7, 11-12, 14-15, 18-19).<sup>8</sup> In the face of such strong evidence against it, it may be wise to

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<sup>3</sup> William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, vol. 2, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1976), 216.

<sup>4</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:219.

<sup>5</sup> Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Revelation 19.11-22.15* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 73-76.

<sup>6</sup> David Mathewson, “The Destiny of the Nations in Revelation 21:1-22:5 : A Reconsideration.,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 1 (2002): 124.

<sup>7</sup> George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John the Divine*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1984), 279.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church and for the World: A Literary-Narrative and Tradition-Historical Reading of the Book of Revelation” (Durham, The University of Durham, 2005), 2. The scriptural lists are Herms’.

resort to theories that allow for a less consistent use of the term nations in Revelation but provide a more coherent narrative.

Bauckham attempts to mediate between universalism (as in Rissi) and particularism (as in Beale), claiming that “Revelation sets side by side without qualifying one by the other the two possible outcomes: the conversion of the nations and their inclusion in God’s kingdom or the judgment of the unrepentant nations.”<sup>9</sup> He maintains that the witness of the slain Lamb and of the martyrs leads the nations either to repentance and conversion or to rebellion and punishment. Bauckham maintains that Revelation gives “theological priority” to the former. He argues that this tension is best explained by the HB expectations of the conversion of the nations and their transformation into God’s people in the new Jerusalem. Bauckham distances himself from both Rissi and Vogelgesang in not expecting *all* the nations to repent. In a footnote, he cautions against the idea of complete universal salvation since it “strain[s] the text intolerably.”<sup>10</sup>

Mathewson joins the discussion with a slightly variant view, suggesting that the tension between judgement and salvation should be allowed to retain its force with no side privileged over the other. Mathewson sees the tension as a rhetorical device presenting the options available to the nations and highlighting “the reversal of power structure and the absolute sovereignty of God.”<sup>11</sup>

The strength of this solution is that it addresses possible pastoral concerns John may have had for his flock. The letters to the seven churches reveal that John cared for his churches and offered repeated warnings and exhortations so that they would remain faithful (Rev. 2:4-5, 10-11, 14-16, 24-25; 3:2-3, 11-12, 18-19). By setting the two fates side by side John helps his audience see the consequences of their actions and choose wisely. The study of related passages in Revelation will show that John often discusses the believers and the unbelievers in

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 104.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 310.

<sup>11</sup> Mathewson, “The Nations in Revelation,” 121. Koester also adopts this position in his recent commentary, though he does not differentiate between Bauckham’s and Mathewson’s view. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 833.

successive, contrasting images. It will also show that John often seems to give some sort of priority to the believers by dealing with them before the wicked.<sup>12</sup>

The problem with this view is the clear indication that for John these two fates are not alternatives between which the nations could choose. Both fates will come to pass, and both are interconnected. This is clear from the fact that even while John describes the new Jerusalem and the positive fate for the nations, he cautions that the unclean will have no part in that city (Rev. 21:27). Likewise, the destruction of the nations and the re-creation of the earth is vital to ushering in the new era of God.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in Revelation John never stipulates that his goal was to provide the nations with two possible consequences for their choices. This is unlike other scriptural passages in which such a choice is explicitly offered to the audience. For instance, in Deut. 30:15-20 Moses clearly sets two courses, one leading to life and another to death. John never does this in Revelation.

Some other commentators note that the pilgrimage of the kings and their nations to the new Jerusalem presupposes their existence on earth, although the text of Revelation records the destruction of the first heaven and first earth (Rev. 21:1).<sup>14</sup> Aune observes that Revelation's eschatological scenario with regard to the nations and their kings shares stages like those found in the Sib. Or. 3:657-731. This means that the inconsistency was already part of John's source material. Aune concludes that despite this inconsistency the motif of the nations coming to Jerusalem at the eschaton "was so firmly fixed in the apocalyptic tradition that it is necessarily included" in Revelation.<sup>15</sup> Herms, who also notes the contradiction in John's sources, concludes that "this tension in Revelation is less real than apparent."<sup>16</sup> He suggests that universalizing is part of the apocalyptic language and accordingly John expected neither the universal destruction of the nations nor their universal salvation. Rather, John employed these traditions, which already contained this tension, for his own rhetorical purposes. According to Herms, the kings

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 4.4.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham appears to allow for both fates to be fulfilled, admitting in a footnote that universal salvation of every human being is incompatible with the narrative of Revelation. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 313.

<sup>14</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1171. See also Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 385.

<sup>15</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1172. See also Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*: (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1919), 763.

<sup>16</sup> Herms, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 251.

offering their glory to God is not a prediction of a literal future event but rather the author's attempt to demonstrate the establishment of the rule of God.<sup>17</sup>

There is no doubt that a similar tension between universalism and particularism exists in other apocalyptic works. However, John seems to be a careful, reflective, and deliberate writer.<sup>18</sup> The question is whether a thoughtful writer like John, who rejected aspects from his sources that were incompatible with his eschatological scenario in several cases,<sup>19</sup> would uncritically include a tension he simply inherited from those sources. Our study of the nations' pilgrimage demonstrates that John reformulates it, emphasizing things that are important to him.<sup>20</sup>

McNicol contends that John's eschatological passages refer to the actual Day of the Lord that has been delayed but will take place,<sup>21</sup> arguing that John's expectations are grounded in prophetic models found in the Psalms and the prophets. These models were also transformed and deepened because of the Christ-event. Although John's language may have been reshaped, the earlier eschatological patterns of the prophets remained in place.<sup>22</sup> McNicol takes the eschatological model of the prophets as the blueprint for the fate of the nations in Revelation. He considers that John argues that "the ultimate defeat and conversion of the nations will take place in the context of the awesome presence of the Divine Warrior."<sup>23</sup> McNicol's conclusion overlaps in many respects with that of Herms.<sup>24</sup>

The strength of this latest position is that it is firmly rooted in John's sources. John's frequent allusions to the Psalms and the prophets and his portrayal of the Parousia as the judgement of the Divine Warrior are also well attested. Additionally, John portrays his status as a fellow servant of the prophets (Rev. 22:9). The problem with McNicol's position is that he

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<sup>17</sup> Herms, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 250.

<sup>18</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 133, 140, 246.

<sup>19</sup> Such as references to the returns of the exiles (Isa. 49:17-18; 60:4; 66:20), sacrifices offered in the temple (Isa. 60:7), or the wealth of the gentiles flowing into Jerusalem (Isa. 60:11), see chapter 9.3.2.

<sup>20</sup> Thus John Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus: The Suffering of Christians in the Revelation of John," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 111. Sweet objects that the references to the nations are "mere scriptural colour". He claims that John's usage of the prophets demonstrates a "creative grasp of each book as a whole".

<sup>21</sup> Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 15.

<sup>22</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations*, 13. A difference may be McNicol's emphasis on the Day of the Lord. In contrast, Herms accords it only cursory discussion.

assumes that the prophets' outlook on the eschaton is the same as John's, thus failing to differentiate between the classical prophetic world view and the apocalyptic one. John is using the language of the prophets, but he also creates a new prophecy. As Schüssler Fiorenza puts it, "the meaning of the mythopoeic language in Rev. cannot be derived from its traditions but only from its literary function in its present historical-literary context. To know the author's original reference points and cultural context helps us to approximate the multivalent meaning and emotive power of the book's imaginative language."<sup>25</sup>

The details of these theories will be critiqued further during the exegesis of Revelation's final chapters. At this point, however, I will introduce my own view. My research will demonstrate that, according to Revelation's eschatological scenario, all the nations are indeed destroyed in Rev. 19:11-21. Additionally, no calls for repentance are extended to the nations during the millennium. The image of the lake of fire does not suggest a place of temporary punishment but a permanent and final judgement.

I will propose that the nations who offer their glory and honour to God in Rev. 21:24-26 are *not* the same nations that sided with the beast and fought against the Lamb. Instead, John transforms his symbol to refer to those remaining faithful to God as his "peoples" and "nations" (Rev. 21:3). I will suggest that the image of the nations entering the new Jerusalem is not one of conversion in which the nations join the rest of the redeemed. Conversion according to John takes place in history before the Parousia.<sup>26</sup> Rather, the nations entering the new Jerusalem are an image of God's multi-ethnic church worshipping him in the new world. The believers "will not lose their national identity" on the new earth.<sup>27</sup> All barriers that prohibited the worship of gentile nations are now removed and unlimited access has been granted to those who were previously rejected.<sup>28</sup>

This proposal is not identical to the view that understands the nations as people who have repented in the past. That interpretation usually understands the nations as a separate group of gentiles that joins other believers. I propose that John has a different scope in mind. The nations of Rev. 21:24 *are* the believers. The nations do not join any other group. They are

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<sup>25</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 22.

<sup>26</sup> I will deal with the question of the conversion of the nations in Revelation in an excursus after chapter 8.

<sup>27</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 284.

<sup>28</sup> Ethnic issues between Jews and gentiles seem to have arisen in at least two of the seven churches (Rev. 2:9; 3:8-9). Neither is it coincidental that the central theme of Rev. 21:22-27 is uninhibited worship. See chapter 9.5.

described in identical terms to the believers, and their pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem signifies their worship of God not incorporation into the other believers. This is a different image from the usual one found in the HB where at best the nations are granted salvation and participation in the worship of God. John probably does so because his churches were also composed of gentiles from many nations.<sup>29</sup> These believers are the apocalyptic community to whom Revelation is addressed. They heeded the warnings of God, remained steadfast in their beliefs, and did not follow the beast. Their salvation took place in history, not at the Parousia nor at the millennium. Whereas in the old world they were rejected or their access to God was inhibited,<sup>30</sup> on the new earth their reward is unlimited and uninhibited access to God.

## 1.2 Methodology

The study of the book of Revelation has unique peculiarities. The usual procedures used in New Testament exegesis, such as the examination of the meaning of words, their syntactical relationships to the literary form and the structure and context of the passage, may yield less than definite results.<sup>31</sup> Halver contends that in the study of Revelation it is possible to know full well what the author said and still have absolutely no idea of what he meant.<sup>32</sup> While this may be an overstatement, it is nonetheless clear that any researcher's methodology should also take into account the peculiarities of the apocalyptic genre.

Revelation's bizarre imagery, the presence of interpreting angels, the heavenly journeys and the eschatological cosmic divine judgements are parts of the apocalyptic genre the prophet is using.<sup>33</sup> At John's time, the apocalyptic genre was not a static literary genre with clearly defined parameters. Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, and Persian writers wrote literary works that modern scholars define as apocalyptic works, but the genre was not fixed and certainly none of the ancient authors felt any obligation to obey literary rules with which they did not agree.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 88.

<sup>30</sup> See chapter 9.5.

<sup>31</sup> Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 157-58.

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Halver, *Der Mythos im letzten Buch der Bibel: eine Untersuchung der Bildersprache der Johannes-Apokalypse* (Hamburg: H. Reich, 1964), 158. Cited in Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 158.

<sup>33</sup> John J. Collins, "Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre," *Semeia* 14, 1979, 7.

<sup>34</sup> This is evident from the fact that of the 31 apocalyptic semes/noemes that Hellholm lists no writing designated as an apocalypse contains all of them. At the same time, none of these semes/noemes are exclusive to



This means that Revelation has its own idiosyncrasies that should be understood and considered before any serious study of the book.

One such peculiarity is that Revelation seems not to possess a clear narrative unity. For example, there is no continuity in the characters that interact in the episodic narratives. Aune observes that Revelation has many “literary devices” linking “the various parts of the text together, although not always in a completely successful manner.”<sup>35</sup> Whether John is successful in uniting his work may be a matter of debate; what seems clear is that the author has worked meticulously to tie these individual units together.<sup>36</sup> Although Aune feels the unity of the narrative has been exaggerated,<sup>37</sup> the web that John has woven trying to connect his various narratives is clear enough to suggest that Revelation is the work of a single author. This appears to be the direction scholarly opinion took once it abandoned the source critical and compilation theories of the 1800s.<sup>38</sup> Even Aune, who suggests a two-stage process in writing Revelation over the span of 30 years from the 60s to the mid-90s, speculates that it was written by one individual who progressively changed his views.<sup>39</sup> For example, the messages to the seven churches seem to be of different character from the subsequent judgements of the book, and indeed Aune consigns them to the second edition of Revelation.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, Christ’s promises to the overcomers in the first six churches allude to the last part of the book and the description of the new Jerusalem in particular (Rev. 2:7 cf. Rev. 22:2; Rev. 2:11 cf. Rev. 20:6; Rev. 2:17 cf. Rev. 22:4; Rev. 2:27, 28; cf. Rev. 19:15, 22:16; Rev. 3:5, cf. Rev 19:8, 20:12; Rev. 3:12, cf. Rev. 21:2, 22:4).

The conclusion from this seems to be that Revelation contains narratives or scenes that, although they appear disengaged from each other, have been arranged by John so as to provide a consistent whole.<sup>41</sup> For the present purpose, we are mainly interested in the coherence of the last three chapters of the book. It will be shown that John provides the reader with a fairly

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apocalyptic writings. David Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” in *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, Semeia 36 (Decatur, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1986), 24.

<sup>35</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), cviii.

<sup>36</sup> David L. Barr, “The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation of the World: A Literary Analysis,” *Interpretation* 38, no. 1 (January 1984): 43.

<sup>37</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cviii.

<sup>38</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxx-cxxii.

<sup>40</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxx.

<sup>41</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 17.

coherent narrative. This does not mean that there are no problems within this narrative;<sup>42</sup> in fact, the fate of the nations is one such problem. The point is that John attempts to establish some sort of sequence of events.<sup>43</sup>

Schüssler Fiorenza describes the literary units of Revelation as pieces of “mosaic stones arranged in a certain design, which climaxes in a description of the final eschatological event.”<sup>44</sup> The inference here is that just as a mosaic cannot be understood by focusing on individual stones, so the book of Revelation has to be viewed as a unified mosaic. This is also the basic premise of Resseguie’s literary approach, who claims that “parts cannot be understood without understanding the whole.”<sup>45</sup>

Using the methodology I will outline below I seek to address the concerns that have been raised. The individual literary units of the book of Revelation are different traditions, motifs and backgrounds that John drew from the HB, New Testament, Jewish apocalyptic, and mythologies. The previous observations demand that these literary units and traditions be identified and studied. This part of the methodology is very much standard redaction criticism. It will seek to determine John’s theological goals and rhetorical strategies in collecting, arranging, modifying and editing the different traditions.<sup>46</sup>

The next step is the literary analysis of the text. John may be borrowing motifs and traditions, but he makes them his own by removing them from their original context and placing them into his. This new context inevitably changes the original meaning because any transfer to a new literary and cultural background inevitably brings changes to the meaning of the text. Thus, tensions emerge between the original context and meaning with the new context and meaning John recreates.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, John often blends traditions from earlier sources into each of his literary units. The result of such a mixture does not always reflect the intent of the original authors since

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<sup>42</sup> Talking about these problems Sweet says that “we must reckon with an element of incoherence”. John Sweet, *Revelation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 44.

<sup>43</sup> As Barr puts it: “...the critic ought to try to come to terms with John’s own organization. We must read *his* work”. Barr, “The Apocalypse as a Symbolic Transformation,” 43.

<sup>44</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 17. In many respects, this methodology coincides with narrative criticism, viewing John’s work as a unified whole and attempting to study the “complexities and nuances of the text, taking note of the structure, rhetoric, setting, characters, point of view, plot and the narrator’s style and his repertoire.” Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 17-18.

<sup>46</sup> Norman Perrin, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 19.

John modifies their content freely.<sup>48</sup> He does not simply expose and interpret prophecies found in the HB.<sup>49</sup> Rather, John is an early Christian prophet in his own right, whose authority is derived from Christ (Rev. 1:1).<sup>50</sup> It is important, therefore, to understand how John shapes these traditions and what his goals are, especially with regard to the fate of the nations.

It is also important to consider the significance of John's arrangement of his material in the chapters in question.<sup>51</sup> How does John relate his individual literary units to each other? What is the relationship between the several visions in Revelation? Some scholars believe that John mostly follows a linear time frame for his visions. Others hold that many visions, such as the seals, trumpets, plagues, are successive periods of the last judgements or recapitulations of the same events portrayed from different angles. The striking similarities between these sets of seven lead many scholars to understand these sets as repetitions.<sup>52</sup> Although the main focus of this dissertation is not on the chapters of Revelation dealing with the seven-fold visions, some believe the principle of recapitulation can be seen in other chapters as well.<sup>53</sup> In any case, any suggestion concerning the progression of John's narrative, whether linear or recapitulatory, will have to be argued from textual markers such as recurring words, themes, phrases or temporal indicators that John has placed in his text.

Another consideration in interpreting Revelation is the type of John's language and the nature of his symbols. Eugene Boring suggests that John's language is primarily pictorial not propositional. By propositional, Boring means an objectifying language; one that speaks of objects or realities and is logical and diachronic. According to Boring, propositional language may use symbols but its symbols are what he calls "steno symbols" or signs. In propositional language, these signs/symbols are codes for literal objectifying meanings.<sup>54</sup> In contrast, most of Revelation's language is pictorial. It does not teach doctrine but uses images that "point

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<sup>48</sup> On the various ways by which John alludes to the HB, see G. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 60-128.

<sup>49</sup> Steve Moyise, "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 39, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 36.

<sup>50</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 21.

<sup>52</sup> Jurgen Roloff, *Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 15. Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 32-44.

<sup>53</sup> For instance, R Fowler White, "Reexamining the Evidence for Recapitulation in Rev 20:1-10," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (1989): 319-44.

<sup>54</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989), 51-52.

beyond themselves to ultimate reality.”<sup>55</sup> Some of these images cannot even be imagined or depicted because they are only meaningful when they are understood as part of John’s overall literary composition.<sup>56</sup> John’s symbols cannot be clearly defined because they derive their meaning from their many associations.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, they cannot be precise either.<sup>58</sup> Boring is correct in observing that John’s symbols are not “steno symbols” or signs depicting one reality. In other words, they cannot be deciphered by a key that simply pairs the symbols with their supposed meaning. They are opaque and polyvalent, serving multiple goals. One such goal may be on a literal level, but a second leads to deeper meanings.<sup>59</sup> So although the beast may be identified on one level as Rome, the polyvalent nature of the symbol allows the imagery to “speak powerfully to more than one set of historical circumstances.”<sup>60</sup> It will be argued below, for example, that the new Jerusalem is a symbol of many things: God’s people, place, or God’s presence.<sup>61</sup> Sometimes the symbol can be two or three things at the same time, whereas in other instances it cannot be all things at the same time.<sup>62</sup> These observations do not mean that John’s language should not be taken seriously. On the contrary, John’s words should be scrutinized so that the interpreter will understand his message.

### 1.3 Limitations and process

References to the nations are scattered throughout the book of Revelation, although they become a lot more frequent in the second part of the book after Rev. 10:11, when John is given the command to prophesy on “peoples, nations, tongues and kings”. The Greek word that is translated as “nations” is *τὰ ἔθνη*. Passages that deal with this word are the central focus of this study. In the LXX, the words *ἔθνος* and *ἔθνη* translate primarily *יָג* and *יָגִים*. The plural came to be used as a technical term for the gentiles. The other word by which the HB describes people is *גוֹי*, which is usually translated as *λαός*. Both the Hebrew *גוֹי* and the Greek *λαός* in the

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<sup>55</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 54.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Ellis Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1962), 94.

<sup>58</sup> Wheelwright, *Metaphor and Reality*, 95.

<sup>59</sup> Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 2001), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology*, 132.

<sup>62</sup> See chapter 9.3.2.

singular came to be used synonymously to mean God's people.<sup>63</sup> Two other words that frequently come up in Revelation to describe people are φυλή and γλῶσσα. φυλή designates "people as a national unity of a common descent." The word is usually translated as tribe. Last, γλῶσσα, translated as tongue (KJV) or language (NRSV), emphasizes the linguistic unity of the people it describes.<sup>64</sup> To avoid treating texts superficially, this study will focus on the last part of the book, especially chapters 19 to 22 where the two distinct fates of the nations are mentioned. Previous references to nations will be dealt with insofar they are relevant to our exegesis.

Before we delve into the exegesis of the final chapters, it is important to note the relationship between these final visions. Scholars are divided on how these visions interact with each other. Some understand them as relating to events that unfold in a linear fashion.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, some others view the millennium as describing events that happened during the church age and the final war of Rev. 20:7-10 as a recapitulation of the war in Rev. 16:14 and 19:11-21.<sup>66</sup> These two views provide a radically different context for the millennium. The first allows for the presence of a temporal age in which—theoretically at least—the nations may repent. The latter view does not. It is important, therefore, to study these positions before we embark on our exegesis of these visions.

The subsequent two chapters will deal with Rev. 19. Emphasis will be given to the two major motifs of this chapter: the coming of the Divine Warrior to pass judgement (Rev. 19:11-21) and the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:1-9). The two motifs will be discussed in reverse order to that in Revelation (i.e., first Rev. 19:11-21 and then Rev. 19:1-9). This is because unlike John, the interest of this study lies primarily with the fate of the wicked nations and secondarily with that of the believers. The motifs appear in succession but is there a relationship between them? Are these motifs reference to the same event from different points of view, namely, the fate of the redeemed and then that of the wicked nations? Emphasis will be on the activity of the Divine Warrior because he attacks and destroys the nations. The nature of the war will be among the questions dealt with. Some scholars understand the activity of the Divine Warrior as an activity of spiritual warfare, the outcome of which is the eventual conquering of the world by the gospel. Is that the best explanation of the imagery in that passage

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<sup>63</sup> G. Bertram, "ἐθνος," in *TDNT*, 2:364-369.

<sup>64</sup> Karl L. Schmidt, "ἐθνος in the NT," in *TDNT*, 2:369-372.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 713. See chapter 2.3.

<sup>66</sup> Primarily amillennial scholars hold this view. E.g., Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 972-83. See chapter 2.2.

or is it Revelation 19 portraying the negative judgement of the nations by the imagery of a universal battle? If the answer is the latter, does the outcome of the war suggest the complete annihilation of the nations or only of their armies, allowing for the possibility that some nations will survive after the event?

The next chapters will deal with the millennium. Those who believe in the possibility of a second chance often identify the millennium as the time when the nations will repent. The millennium and its aftermath is naturally divided into four segments: that of the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), the reign of the saints (Rev. 20:4-6), the final assault of Satan against the beloved city (Rev. 20:7-10) and, finally appended to these segments, is the judgement before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). The subsequent four chapters of the dissertation will concentrate on these individual segments of the millennium and seek to find the traditions or concerns that lie behind John's images. Then we will attempt to find how these images work with each other or if they even contradict each other. The lake of fire in particular will be studied since it is the prescribed punishment of the wicked. Are these wicked the nations that were destroyed in Rev. 20:8-9? Why is John using an image here (i.e., the lake of fire) that is not found elsewhere in the Bible? Do any of the images of Rev. 20 suggest any missionary activity through which the nations come to repentance? These questions are directly related to the problem of the nations and will thus have to be dealt with in detail.

The next chapter will focus on the new Jerusalem. The first major topic of the chapter is the significance of the new heavens and the new earth. Can anything old, like the nations, still be part of the new world? Next, the chapter will deal with the image of the nations entering the new Jerusalem. It will be argued that this image is that of worship and uninhibited access to God, not one of conversion or repentance. The image of the tree of life will also be discussed. It will be demonstrated that John repeats the same ideas of worship and access to God with different symbols. Next, it will be argued that the nations are not remnants of the old world but rather God's people on the new earth. The chapter will close with a study of the kings of the earth. Last, the main points of this study will be revisited and summarized in the conclusion.

This methodology provides a clear blueprint for the study of the problem. It takes into account John's individual literary units, considers their background and the new function they serve in John's creation. It does not view John as a mere collector of imagery but as the literary creator who selects, modifies, and arranges his material to achieve his purposes. A systematic

study guided by these principles will contribute to our understanding of John's literary and rhetorical goals in general and his treatment of the nations in particular.

## 2. The structure and relationship between the final visions of Revelation

The problem of the fate of the nations unfolds in the last part of the book where both their destruction and their surprising salvation are described in chapters 19 to 22. These chapters are usually thought of as containing seven visions that move from the subject of Babylon to the new Jerusalem (Rev. 19:11-Rev. 21:8)<sup>67</sup> and the description of the new Jerusalem is then appended to these visions (Rev. 21:9-22:9). It is not, however, altogether clear how to divide these chapters into seven visions. Another question about these visions concerns their temporal relationship. Are they to be understood as events that unfold in a linear, temporal fashion or as visions that recapitulate past events? The answer to this question greatly affects the interpretation of these texts in general and the fate of the nations in particular. A linear understanding of the visions allows for a millennium after the Divine Warrior destroys the nations in Rev. 19:17-21. Scholars who adhere to premillennialism understand the battle of the Divine Warrior to mean the Parousia of Christ, and the events of the millennium as following it.<sup>68</sup> Some argue that during the thousand years a second chance is given to the nations to repent. In contrast to this view, those who adhere to amillennialism deny the existence of a millennium after the second coming. They think that the millennium is a symbolic term that refers to the age of the church between the two advents of Christ.<sup>69</sup> The amillennial position thus rejects the notion of a period in which the nations may have another chance of repentance.<sup>70</sup> Since the problem of the fate of the nations culminates in these final visions of Revelation, it is imperative to investigate them in detail and understand their temporal relationship with each other.

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<sup>67</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 6.

<sup>68</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 696.

<sup>69</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 696. Beale, who subscribes to this view prefers the term “inaugurated millennialism”. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 973.

<sup>70</sup> A third position is that of postmillennialism, which argues that the millennium will be a golden era of peace and spiritual enlightenment before the second coming. Osborne, *Revelation*, 697. Postmillennialism used to be the prevailing interpretation during the Victorian era all the way to 1914. However, the advent of WWI shattered the previous optimism and awoke interpreters to the harsh realities of war, greed, starvation; the “hope for Utopia vanished.” M. C. Tenney, “The Importance and Exegesis of Rev. 20:1-8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 111 (1954): 138. According to Stefanovic, postmillennialism has been practically abandoned. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 574.



## 2.1 The final visions

Commentators often rely on John's use of the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* as an indication of the beginning of a new vision.<sup>71</sup> This phrase leads Adela Yarbro Collins to divide the chapters in the following way: (1) The second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-16); (2) the call to a grisly banquet (Rev. 19:17-18); (3) the final battle (Rev. 19:19-21); (4) the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3); (5) the thousand year reign (Rev. 20:4-10); (6) the last judgement (Rev. 20:11-15); (7) the new creation and new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:1-8).<sup>72</sup> However, the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* is found eight times in these passages, not seven (see Rev. 20:12).<sup>73</sup> This means that this alone cannot be thought of as a definite linguistic marker introducing seven visions. Furthermore, the *καὶ εἶδον* divides the passages in a thoroughly "unsatisfactory way".<sup>74</sup> For instance, it is not clear why the scene of the rider on the white horse descending to attack his enemies should be divided into three visions: one depicting his charge, the second announcing the invitation of the carrion-feeding birds to eat the slaughtered enemies, and a third describing the outcome of the battle. Another thematic problem that arises when we only rely on the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* to divide the literary units is that the millennium is divided into two parts. The first one deals with what happens at the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3), and the second with what happens *during* and *after* the thousand years (Rev. 20:4-11). However, as Müller demonstrates, the chapter contains three distinct sections that portray what happens (1) before the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3); (2) during the millennium (Rev. 20:4-6); and (3) after the millennium (Rev. 20:7-10). This last section is introduced by the phrase *καὶ ὅταν*.<sup>75</sup> It is evident that simply relying on the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* neither produces seven visions exactly, nor divides the passages thematically in a satisfactory manner.

MacLeod divides the passages from Rev. 19:11 to Rev. 22:5 into seven visions in a different way: (1) the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-16), (2) the defeat of the Antichrist (Rev. 19:17-21), (3) the binding of Satan (Rev. 20:1-3), (4) the millennial kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20:4-6), (5) the loosing of Satan and his final defeat (Rev. 20:7-10), (6) the last judgement

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<sup>71</sup> Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Apocalypse* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1979), 134-46.

<sup>73</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 6. In fact, there is yet another "*καὶ ... εἶδον*" in Rev. 21:2 which A.Y. Collins explains as not introducing a new vision.

<sup>74</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 6.

<sup>75</sup> Ekkehardt Müller, "Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 20," *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 37, no. 2 (January 1, 1999): 229-30. See also Osborne, *Revelation*, 697.

at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15), (7) the new heavens and new earth (Rev 21:1-22:5).<sup>76</sup> This division is not based solely on textual markers or phrases, like the *καὶ εἶδον*, but probably divides the passages into more clear-cut themes and is therefore helpful for the study of the individual passages. The absence of formal markers introducing each of these visions may suggest that John did not intend to describe seven distinct visions.<sup>77</sup>

A problem with MacLeod's division is the incorporation of Rev. 21:9-22:5 as part of the last vision. Thematically, the passage clearly belongs with Rev. 21:1-8, which introduces the new Jerusalem. However, John introduces Rev. 21:9 in terms that are clearly parallel to Rev. 17:1. In fact, Giblin argues convincingly that Rev. 17:1-19:10 and Rev. 21:9-22:9 are paired angelic revelations.<sup>78</sup> This illustrates the technique that John often works with, "structures within structures" that are not necessarily "mutually incompatible."<sup>79</sup> These two angelic revelations and their mutual relationship will be discussed in detail later. Suffice it to note that John crafted Rev. 21:9-22:9 to be thematically related to Rev. 21:1-8 but also clearly structurally parallel to Rev. 17:1-19:10. In chapter 9.1, the passages describing the new earth (Rev. 21:1-22:5), will be further divided into smaller units based on thematic, structural or other stylistic considerations in order to facilitate a better exegesis of the text.

More relevant to our topic than the division of Rev. 19:11-Rev. 22:5 into distinct units is the relationship these units have with each other. Some understand the passages to refer to unfolding events that proceed successively,<sup>80</sup> and others understand some visions as recapitulating others.<sup>81</sup> Those who understand the visions as unfolding linearly see two battles; one in Rev. 19:11-21 and another after the end of the millennium in Rev. 20:7-10. In contrast, those who believe that John is using the principle of recapitulation believe that he describes the

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<sup>76</sup> David MacLeod, "Heaven's Hallelujah Chorus: An Introduction to the Seven 'Last Things' (Rev. 19:1-10)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156, no. January-March (1999): 73. The titles of the visions are MacLeod's.

<sup>77</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 750. See also David Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium in Rev 20:1-6: Consummation and Recapitulation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2001): 243 n. 27.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," *Biblica* 55, no. 4 (1974): 487-504. See also Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xciv-xcvi.

<sup>79</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 108.

<sup>80</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 751. See also George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 261, Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 352, and Tenney, "The Importance and Exegesis of Rev. 20:1-8."

<sup>81</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence." R Fowler White, "Making Sense of Rev 20:1-10? Harold Hoehner Versus Recapitulation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 4 (December 1994): 539-51. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 974-83; Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 237-51.

same battle twice, each time emphasizing different aspects of the battle.<sup>82</sup> The rest of this chapter will analyse the arguments for and against recapitulation in these visions of Revelation. A proper understanding of the relationship these visions share with each other is vital in fully exploring John's rhetoric concerning the fate of the nations.

## 2.2 The recapitulation theory in Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev 20:1-10

### 2.2.1 Main arguments for the recapitulation theory

A linear approach to the visions understands the passages as describing some sort of historical sequence that takes place after Rev. 19:11-21. The recapitulation theory instead claims that the author returns his attention to the past events and adds further details or depicts them from a different point of view. F. White advocates recapitulation on the basis of three arguments.<sup>83</sup> First, he notes some discrepancies between the events depicted in Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:1-3. Rev. 20:1-3 describes the binding of Satan to prevent him from deceiving the nations, yet in Rev. 19:21 the nations and the rest (*λοιποί*) have already been completely destroyed<sup>84</sup> by the Parousia of Christ and have already been deceived in Rev. 16:13-16,<sup>85</sup> so that according to White the binding of Satan cannot possibly take place after the nations have been destroyed.

The second argument is that the two battles in Rev. 19:17-21 and Rev. 20:7-10 are described as the same battle.<sup>86</sup> The reasons for this argument are fourfold. First, the underlying material that John uses for both battles is the battle against Gog from the land of Magog in Ezek. 38-39.<sup>87</sup> It is noted that while in Rev. 19:21 God's enemies are defeated by the sword, they are defeated by fire in Rev. 20:9. White does not think that this implies that John refers to two separate battles, because in Ezek. 38:22; 39:6 the Divine Warrior fights Gog and Magog with fire while in Ezek. 38:21; 39:17-21 slays them with the sword.<sup>88</sup> So the disparate depictions of how God kills his enemies are not mutually exclusive but are complimentary accounts

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<sup>82</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 336.

<sup>83</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 320. White divides his arguments into three categories whereas Mathewson divides them into four. Since White started the discussion and Mathewson follows him closely, I will follow his outline of arguments.

<sup>84</sup> Beale, *John's Use*, 368-69.

<sup>85</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 321. Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 239.

<sup>86</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 325.

<sup>87</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 240-41.

<sup>88</sup> White, "Making Sense," 543.

consistent with Ezek 38-39.<sup>89</sup> Second, John speaks of this eschatological battle as “the war” (τὸν πόλεμον, Rev. 16:14; 19:19; 20:8) with a definite article. This means that he does not refer to warfare in general but rather to a specific war, “the age-ending battle at Christ’s return”.<sup>90</sup> Third, in Rev. 15:1 John has already told the reader that God’s wrath was completed with the seven last plagues (ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev. 15:1). The battle of the combined forces of the dragon, the false prophet and the beast at Armageddon (see Rev. 16:12-16) is described as the last plague of Rev. 16:17-21. If the seven plagues fulfil God’s wrath, then this suggests that God’s battles in Revelation after the seventh plague are recapitulations of that final battle. Thus, Rev. 19:11-21 describes the seventh plague using one kind of imagery, but so does Rev. 20:7-10. As Mathewson puts it, Rev 20:7-10 “cannot be a further expression of God’s wrath against the nations” but must be understood as another version of Rev. 19:17-21.<sup>91</sup> Fourth, White points out that the various visions in Rev. 6:12-17; 16:17-21; 19:11-21 and 20:9-11 allude to the cosmic phenomena that accompany the advent of the Divine Warrior.<sup>92</sup> Among these are the “darkening and rending of the heavens” and the “disintegration of the earth” (Rev. 6:12-17; 16:17-21). These events, according to White, equate to the advent of the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:11-21 as well to the cosmic dimensions of the theophany in Rev. 20:9-11 where heaven and earth disappear “at the appearance of the Divine Judge.”<sup>93</sup>

White’s final argument is that the motif of angelic ascent or descent in Revelation initiates a recapitulatory visionary sequence that begins in a setting prior to the second coming and ends with the Parousia.<sup>94</sup> We should note that White recognizes this last argument only as corroborative evidence of recapitulation. To the above arguments, Mathewson adds that the presence of recapitulation elsewhere in Revelation supports these end of time visions in Rev. 19 and 20 and may also be understood as repetition of each other.<sup>95</sup> In order to support this, Mathewson cites the recapitulation of the seals, trumpets, and bowls sequences.

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<sup>89</sup> White, “Making Sense,” 543.

<sup>90</sup> White, “Reexamining the Evidence,” 329-30.

<sup>91</sup> Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 242. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 982.

<sup>92</sup> White, “Reexamining the Evidence,” 331. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 980.

<sup>93</sup> White, “Reexamining the Evidence,” 332.

<sup>94</sup> White, “Reexamining the Evidence,” 336.

<sup>95</sup> Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 239.

### 2.2.2 Critique of the recapitulation theory in Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev 20:1-10

White's first argument, the discrepancy between the events depicted in Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:1-3, is based on his interpretation of these events. White observes that a linear understanding of these events would suggest that in Rev. 20:1-3 Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations that have already been destroyed in Rev. 19:19-21. But this problem is due to a specific understanding of these texts. For instance, interpreters who believe that only the armies of the nations are destroyed in Rev. 19:21<sup>96</sup> do not face this problem. White and Beale argue that the description of the outcome of the battle leaves no room for survivors from the battle and they may be right in this respect.<sup>97</sup> However, if another interpretation is put forward for the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 that can stand even if all the nations are destroyed in the battle then there is no real logical inconsistency between the two events if they are thought of as sequential. In fact, I will make such a proposal in my discussion of Rev. 20:1-3. Suffice it here to point out that this critique depends on a particular interpretation of these passages and there may be options that do *not* place the two events at odds with each other.

It should be noted furthermore that White's and Mathewson's recapitulation theory creates other logical inconsistencies. For instance, neither explains satisfactorily how Satan's binding is supposed to function in the context of the recapitulation theory. Both are proponents of the amillennial interpretation.<sup>98</sup> Those supporting amillennialism usually understand the period of the millennium to be a reference to the reign of Christ with His church until the Parousia,<sup>99</sup> but it is problematic to see how Satan is bound during a period that Revelation understands elsewhere to be the peak of demonic activity (see Rev. 13).<sup>100</sup> Mathewson admits that it is difficult to reconcile the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 with his title in Rev. 12:9 as the deceiver of the inhabited world.<sup>101</sup> He proposes that the millennium is not a reference to a period at all but it "metaphorically portrays the complete victory and vindication of the saints at the Parousia of Christ."<sup>102</sup> The point of this discussion is not to provide a full explanation of

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<sup>96</sup> For example, Osborne, *Revelation*, 688.

<sup>97</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 981. White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 324.

<sup>98</sup> Charles E Powell, "Progression versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20:1-6," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 649 (March 2006): 94. Powell observes that the recapitulation view of the passage is usually associated with amillennialism.

<sup>99</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 260.

<sup>100</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 244.

<sup>101</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 244.

<sup>102</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 248.

John's symbolism concerning the millennium. This will be left for a later chapter. The point is to show that the consistency of a view depends on the exegesis of Rev. 20 and that the recapitulation theory itself is not free from such problems.

The next set of White's arguments deals with the similarities between the two war passages, Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:7-10. First, it is true that Ezek. 38-39 is behind both these passages. It is also true that Ezek. contains two types of destruction of the evil nations, by sword and by fire. However, John exercises great creative freedom with his sources. Sometimes the new meaning he produces even contradicts the original meaning of the HB passage he alludes to.<sup>103</sup> The fact that John alludes to the same HB text in two of his passages cannot automatically mean that these passages refer to the same event. For instance, John uses the image of Christ having flaming eyes (οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ ὡς φλῶξ πυρὸς) to describe Christ in the inaugural vision (Rev. 1:14), and in the address to the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:18), as well as in his description of the Divine Warrior who brings punishment to the nations in Rev. 19:12. In all these cases, John probably alludes to the same passage (Dan. 10:6).<sup>104</sup> While the underlying meaning is always the penetrating vision of Christ as the omniscient judge, the incidents are clearly different, as is the outcome of the judgement. Likewise, the fact that the war imagery of Ezek. 38-39 is used both in Rev. 19 and 20 does not necessarily mean that these two accounts refer to the same event.

The next argument has to do with the arthrous expression τὸν πόλεμον (the war). The fact that John uses the article before "war" is not sufficient to suggest that he is referring to a past war he has spoken about previously (Rev. 16:14; Rev. 19:19). John's use of articles is problematic. He sometimes uses the definite article for nouns or persons who have not yet even been introduced in the narrative. Aune demonstrates that John consistently uses the article before motifs drawn from apocalyptic stock imagery. So, for example, John speaks of *the* abyss (Rev. 9:1), *the* resurrection (Rev. 20:5-6), *the* seven angels that stand before God (Rev. 8:2), and *the* eagle (Rev. 12:14).<sup>105</sup> It is likely then that the article before war is part of John's style of adding articles before apocalyptic stock images and was not placed there to equate the two wars.

An additional problem seeing this war as a recapitulation of that in Rev. 16:12-16, and Rev. 19:17-21 is that in Rev. 20:8 Satan alone appears to deceive the nations. In Rev. 16:13, all

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<sup>103</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 94.

<sup>104</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1054.

<sup>105</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, clxvi.

the three members of the evil trinity (Satan, the beast, and the false prophet) take part in the deception. If the war in Rev. 20:8 follows the war of Rev. 19:17-21 temporally, this is not a problem because the beast and the false prophet have already received their punishments in the lake of fire in Rev. 19:20. The fact that only Satan deceives the nations and leads them to “the war” suggests that the other two villains, the beast and the false prophet, are already out of the picture in the lake of fire. In chapter 7, the differences between the two wars will be further analysed, showing that these wars are “sufficiently different to warrant the view of a second battle rather than a recapitulation of the first.”<sup>106</sup>

The next argument has to do with the finality of God’s wrath. White observes that Rev. 15:1 predicts that God’s wrath will be completed in the final seven plagues. Indeed, God’s wrath is mentioned in both Rev. 16:19 and Rev. 19:15.<sup>107</sup> However, there is no mention of God’s wrath in Rev. 20. This chapter contains neither the words *θυμός* nor *ὀργή*, present in both Rev. 16:19 and 19:15. Since there is no explicit mention of the wrath of God in Rev. 20, it is best not to assume that the war is its expression.

Likewise, the cosmic destruction described in Rev. 6:12-17; 16:17-21; 19:11-21 is different from that in Rev. 20:9-11. Hoehner correctly points out that the differences between these passages are greater than the similarities.<sup>108</sup> The open heaven in Rev. 19:11 is probably a reference to God about to make a revelation like the one in Rev. 4:1.<sup>109</sup> This is a substantially different image from the signs in the sun, the moon and the stars in Rev. 6:12-13 or the earthquake that removes the islands and the mountains from their place in Rev. 16:20. In Rev. 20:11, the flight of earth and heaven before God is probably an image that accompanies the theophany of the passage.<sup>110</sup> Theophanies are usually associated with signs in heaven and earth, which their authors borrow for their own situations. For example, in Deborah’s song the author borrows from the Sinai theophany that is accompanied by the trembling of the earth, the downpouring of the heavens and the quaking of mountains (Judg. 5:4-5).<sup>111</sup> The fact that two

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<sup>106</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 713. See chapter 7.3.

<sup>107</sup> White, “Making Sense,” 547. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 982.

<sup>108</sup> Hoehner, “Evidence from Revelation 20,” in Donald K. Campbell and Jeffery L. Townsend, eds., *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1992), 260-61. Found in White, “Making Sense,” 548.

<sup>109</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 679.

<sup>110</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1081.

<sup>111</sup> Terry Brensinger, *Judges*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 70.

theophanies are accompanied by signs in heaven is not evidence that they are references to the same event, especially since these signs are strikingly different.

Last, the idea is also flawed that because recapitulation is part of Revelation's style—this opens up the possibility for these passages to be interpreted as repetitions.<sup>112</sup> Recapitulation in Revelation is usually thought to occur in a succession of vision cycles like the seals, trumpets and plagues. In this passage, the proposal is that there is recapitulation “within the same vision cycle.”<sup>113</sup> Additionally, passages that are usually thought of as recapitulating each other portray the same event with different imagery.<sup>114</sup> Both the proposed passages use the imagery of war in this case. However, just as Mathewson's argument did not prove the existence of recapitulation in this context, this argument does not disprove it. The point is that if there is recapitulation in these visions it is unlike the other instances of recapitulation, and therefore they cannot be invoked as evidence to support it.

The main arguments put forward for reading the events of the millennium as recapitulation of past events were four. These are based mainly on supposed logical inconsistencies if the visions are read successively, and on the similarities that the war of Rev. 19:11-21 has to Rev. 20:7-10. It was noted that the inconsistencies could be due to a particular interpretation of the second coming or the millennium. If a temporally linear interpretation of the visions is assumed, then that interpretation should be free from inconsistencies. With regard to the supposed similarities between the two wars, it was shown that the fact that John used the same war imagery from Ezek. 38-39 in both cases did not necessarily mean that they both referred to the same event. Dissimilarities were also pointed out, such as different means of destruction for the wicked (by sword in Rev. 19:21 and by fire in Rev. 20:9). The suggestion that the dissimilarities simply point to different complementary views of the same event<sup>115</sup> whereas the similarities point to the fact that the two wars are the same is probably a weak argument. Most portrayals of wars involve casualties and how they were inflicted. Likewise, most theophanies include dramatic effects in nature. The similarities between these wars or theophanies do not necessarily mean that they refer to the same event. Aune's observation with regard to similarities within a text is instructive. He argues that “just because the book of Judges

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<sup>112</sup> Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 239.

<sup>113</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 751.

<sup>114</sup> For example, the second coming is portrayed in Rev. 14:14-20 as the harvest of the earth and in Rev. 19:11-21 with the imagery of war.

<sup>115</sup> White, “Making Sense,” 543.



uses a stereotyped outline to narrate the experience of premonarchic Israel in terms of recurring cycles of national apostasy, enslavement, repentance, and deliverance... does not mean that each cycle should be designated as a 'recapitulation' of the others."<sup>116</sup>

What the analysis of those who believe in the recapitulation of these visions failed to produce is linguistic markers from the text that direct the reader to see the events of Rev. 20 as a recapitulation of past events. A careful analysis of the passages will not only show that such linguistic markers do not exist, but also that John imbedded textual markers that suggest a temporally linear understanding of the visions.

### 2.3 A linear understanding of the visions between Rev. 19:11 and Rev. 22.9

The most compelling evidence in understanding the vision of Rev. 20:1-3 as the aftermath of Rev. 19:11-21 comes from the unfolding of the fate of the main characters of the plot. The consequence of the battle in Rev. 19 is the arrest of the beast and the false prophet and their subsequent casting into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). The beast and the false prophet are the two actors of the evil trinity that began the war against God in Rev. 16:13. Although Rev. 19:20 reveals the fate of the beast and the false prophet, as well as that of their armies, it is strangely silent on the fate of the dragon. Reading Revelation as a narrative, the reader is left wondering about the fate of the third and perhaps most important villain of the plot. The fact that John turns his attention to the dragon, Satan, in Rev. 20:2 indicates that the narratives are sequential. John has dealt with the first two villains; he now deals with the final enemy of God's people.<sup>117</sup> Although all the names of Satan are mentioned in Rev. 20:2 (dragon, ancient snake, Devil, Satan) the first name by which he is identified is that of dragon. He is identified by this name when he allies himself with the beast and the false prophet against God in Rev. 16:13.

Immediately after the destruction of the beast and the false prophet,<sup>118</sup> Satan is bound in the abyss. This image will be analysed in great detail later but here it is necessary to point out that the theme of angels bound before their final punishment is a common apocalyptic motif.

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<sup>116</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xcii.

<sup>117</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Revelation*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 247. Joel Badina, "The Millennium," in *Symposium on Revelation, Book 2: Exegetical & General Studies* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 235.

<sup>118</sup> Tenney points out that the "destruction of the beast and the false prophet is fixed at the beginning of the thousand year period, and their torment in the lake of fire continues through it." Tenney, "The Importance and Exegesis of Rev. 20:1-8," 143.

Those who do not accept the linear interpretation of the chapter assume that the passage goes back in time to when Jesus's first coming limited<sup>119</sup> Satan's activity.<sup>120</sup> Here however, it appears more natural to understand the binding of Satan as the result of his defeat in Rev. 19. Furthermore, this apocalyptic background suggests an imprisonment with temporal dimension, just like the imprisonment of angels in 1 En. In 1 En. 10:6, Azazel is bound until his fiery judgement (ἐν πυρρίσμον), in 1 En. 10:12 another fallen watcher, Semyaza and his fellow angels, are imprisoned for 70 generations, and in 1 En. 18:16 for ten thousand years (ἐν ταυτῶν μυρίων).<sup>121</sup> Likewise, in 1 En. 21:6 seven fallen angels are bound together for ten thousand years (μύρια ἔτη).<sup>122</sup> Even though not all the passages that speak of angelic imprisonment contain specific time references, it is clear from the context that in all cases the imprisonment is temporal and does not simply curtail the powers of the angels but restrains them totally.

An alternative view is proposed by Mathewson. He suggests that Rev. 20:1-6 occurs at the second coming in Rev. 19:11-21 but Rev. 20:7-10 is still considered as a recapitulation of the war in Rev. 19:17-20.<sup>123</sup> Necessary for Mathewson's proposal is a "non-literal" understanding of the millennium. Mathewson's term needs clarification. Most scholars seem to have a non-literal understanding of the millennium. It seems to me that what Mathewson means is a *non-temporal* understanding of it. He claims that "the reference to the one thousand years is important, not for the temporal information it conveys, but for its meaning and thematic value: it metaphorically portrays the complete victory and vindication of the saints at the Parousia of Christ"<sup>124</sup> To support his theory, Mathewson cites time periods from Revelation such as the 10 days of persecution of Rev. 2:10 that he claims alludes to Dan. 1:12-15, and "the

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<sup>119</sup> Amillennialists usually argue that "the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 is not absolute." Powell, "Progression versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20," 98.

<sup>120</sup> Kevin W Larsen, "Neglected Considerations in Understanding the Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Restoration Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2017): 232. See also Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 242. Mathewson though does not subscribe to the view that Rev. 20:1-6 symbolizes the "interadvent" period. At the same time, he accepts that Rev. 20:7-10 is a recapitulation of Rev. 19:11-21. His view will be assessed later in this chapter.

<sup>121</sup> The Ethiopic text reads "until the time of the completion of their sin in the year of mystery." The Greek text is earlier and may be the text from which the Ethiopic text was translated, although Isaac does not exclude the possibility that a major portion underlying that text was of Aramaic origin. E. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *OTP*, ed. James Charlesworth, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 6.

<sup>122</sup> The Ethiopic text reads "ten million years".

<sup>123</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 242.

<sup>124</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 248.

three and a half years, 42 months or 1290<sup>125</sup> days in 11:2, 3 12:6, 14; 13:5 as describing the time of the church's testing."<sup>126</sup> But the examples that Mathewson provides fail to demonstrate his point. The three and a half years, or 42 months or 1260 days, indeed are no references to 1260 literal days, but this does not mean that they are not references to temporal eras in which the church struggled against persecution. Even though not all commentators agree on which era that period symbolizes, they seem to agree that they do symbolize a particular era.<sup>127</sup>

The temporal nature of the millennium is also evident in that it is portrayed in Revelation as the time between two resurrections. The first resurrection takes place at the beginning of the millennium as Rev. 20:4 clearly says: *καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη*. In the next verse, Rev. 20:5, another resurrection is envisaged, presumably the second resurrection: *οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη*. These two verses suggest that the period sandwiched between these two resurrections is the millennium and it must be a temporal period.

The use of temporal conjunctions also demonstrates that the millennium is a reference to a period and that Rev. 20 unfolds chronologically. This is shown by the use of the temporal conjunction *ἄχρι*. The conjunction appears twice, in Rev. 20:3, 5 in the identical phrase *ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη*. As a temporal conjunction, it delineates the timing of an action.<sup>128</sup> Thus the millennium is described as a temporal period at the end of which some actions will be taken. Another temporal conjunction that demonstrates that the millennium is a chronological period is the conjunction *ὅταν*. This conjunction shows that the loosing of Satan will occur *when* the 1000 years are fulfilled (Rev. 20:7). It seems clear that the millennium is an epoch in God's economy and should be clearly identified as such.

Additionally, the resurrections at the beginning and end of the millennium speak against a major premise of amillennialism. According to proponents of this view, the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection, or the new birth of believers.<sup>129</sup> However, this first resurrection is juxtaposed with the second resurrection of the wicked. The amillennial interpretation requires

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<sup>125</sup> The time period is 1260 days not 1290 days as Mathewson writes. The 1290 days period is in Dan. 12:11 but that period is not used in Revelation.

<sup>126</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 247.

<sup>127</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 498; Koester. for instance. understands that period to be the time between Christ's ascension and his second coming. On the other hand, Osborne believes that this more likely refers "to the final period of eschatological judgment." Osborne, *Revelation*, 414. Despite their differences in interpretation, they both seem to agree that John refers to a temporal period.

<sup>128</sup> Μιχάλης Οικονόμου, *Γραμματική της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής*, 19th ed. (Αθήνα: ΟΕΔΒ, 2003), 247.

<sup>129</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1004-5.

the reader to understand the first resurrection as spiritual (since no general bodily resurrection has taken place in history) and the second as physical (since the NT never speaks of a spiritual resurrection of the wicked), a gross inconsistency over the course of two verses.<sup>130</sup> To make matters worse for the amillennial position, the context of Rev. 20:4 speaks of beheaded martyrs. A spiritual resurrection so that beheaded martyrs will reign with Christ makes no sense.

These points indicate that John aimed at presenting the events of the millennium as unfolding in a temporal sequence. In the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, I submit that the author intended the reader to read these passages sequentially. There is no reason to suppose that after the description of the second coming in Rev. 19:11-21 John chose to go back in time and describe the church age as a time of the believers' reign. In fact, it seems natural to assume that once God has dealt with the beast and the false prophet, his attention should turn to the last remaining villain of the evil trinity. The binding of Satan after the battle fits this scenario. Whether literal or not, the thousand years appear to be a period of time. At the beginning and the end of this period, the two resurrections take place. Since the subjects of the first resurrection are the dead saints, it is best to understand this resurrection as the literal raising of believers from the grave at the second coming. The fact that the second resurrection is that of the unbelievers also supports the notion that John is not speaking here of spiritual rising with Christ, but of a literal resurrection. This view takes seriously John's language in Rev. 19-22 portraying the sequence of a "preliminary judgement, millennium, final judgement, new heaven and new earth."<sup>131</sup>

So far, this study has focused on Rev. 20:1-10, which describes the events before, during and after the millennium. The theory that the war of Rev. 20:7-10 is a recapitulation of Rev. 19:11-21 was found to be unsatisfactory. However, most of the debate was concentrated on the notion that the two wars are not a recapitulation of each other, which allows the possibility that John employs recapitulation in other passages. In fact, I will propose that the last vision of the judgement before the white throne can be thought of as recapping the events of the war in Rev. 20:7-10. Whereas Rev. 20:7-10 describes the final destruction of the wicked and Satan with the

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<sup>130</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 356. Mounce quotes Alford's remark on the subject: "if, in a passage where two resurrections are mentioned...the first resurrection may be understood to mean spiritual rising with Christ, while the second means literal rising from the grave;-then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything". See also Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 266.

<sup>131</sup> Witherington III, *Revelation*, 245.

imagery of war, Rev. 20:11-15 portrays it as a judgement.<sup>132</sup> The reason why the two passages recapitulate each other will be discussed in chapter 7.5.

## 2.4 Conclusion: An overview of the events of Rev. 19:11-22:5

These conclusions allow us to sketch John's plot in the following way: Rev. 19:11-16 describes the Divine Warrior riding a white horse and leading his armies into battle.<sup>133</sup> The aftermath of the battle is described in Rev. 19:17-21 where the earth is full of corpses and the defeated beast and false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire. After this battle, an angel from heaven binds Satan in the abyss for a thousand years in Rev. 20:1-3. During that time, the saints reign and judge together with Christ. This reign includes the dead martyrs who have been raised at the beginning of the thousand-year period.<sup>134</sup>

The rest of the dead are raised at the end of that period (Rev. 20:5a), precisely when Satan is unbound from his captivity (Rev. 20:7). Satan deceives the resurrected nations into attacking the camp of the saints but fire from heaven devours his armies (Rev. 20:7-9). Then Satan himself is thrown into the lake of fire. The next vision describes this last event as a court scene before God's throne (Rev. 20:11-15). All the dead stand before the throne while the books are opened. The scene can be understood as a universal judgement scene in which all (believers and non-believers) are judged according to their deeds, although only one outcome of judgement is actually described; the lake of fire for those whose names are not found in the book of life (Rev. 20:15). This probably suggests that John reiterates only the judgement of the wicked that he just mentioned.<sup>135</sup>

Once all the wicked and all supernatural enemies of God have been thrown into the lake, John envisions and describes a new world. At the centre of this new world is the city of the new Jerusalem. This study will assume the aforementioned temporal sequence of events. The careful exegesis of the visions will yield further information supporting the conclusions that have been drawn above.

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<sup>132</sup> J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgement in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 141.

<sup>133</sup> It will be argued later that this is an image of the second coming of Christ.

<sup>134</sup> See chapter 7.1.

<sup>135</sup> Jan Lambrecht, "Final Judgments and Ultimate Blessings: The Climactic Visions of Revelation 20,11-21,8," *Biblica* 81, no. 3 (2000): 369.

This order of events allows for the existence of a millennium as a temporal period between the Parousia in Rev. 19:11-21 and the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21-22. This means that the events that take place in this period will have to be meticulously examined to determine whether John envisions or at the minimum allows for the possibility of a second chance for the nations. In any case, the temporal relationship we have established for the final visions provides a basis upon which the process of our exegesis can begin.

### 3. Rev. 19 and the destruction of the nations

Rev. 19 and the battle between of the rider on the white horse and the assembled kings of the earth and the nations is at the heart of the problem of the fate of the nations. Although the victory of the Lamb against the kings was foretold in Rev 17:14, the image of Rev. 19:17-21 is far more devastating. The rider on the white horse not only defeats his enemies but the conclusion of the battle is portrayed as the gruesome “supper of God” where the defeated are eaten by scavenging birds (Rev. 19:17-18). Two of the three evil protagonists of Revelation, the beast and the false prophet, are thrown into the lake of fire while the rest are killed by the sword of the rider (Rev. 19:20-21). The imagery suggests the complete annihilation of evil. The only remaining evil force is the devil, who is dealt with in the immediately succeeding passage (Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10). If we are to analyse the fate of the nations and understand John’s interpretive strategies concerning the nation’s future, it is imperative to appreciate his message in Rev. 19.

The majority of scholars understand the image of the rider on the white horse descending with his armies to battle the nations as an image of the second coming of Christ.<sup>136</sup> This view, however, is not uncontested. The passage lacks most of the characteristics of the second coming found in other early Christian traditions.<sup>137</sup> Some others understand the image of the rider as depicting “Christ’s defeat of the nations by His bare Word.”<sup>138</sup> Even among those who agree that the image alludes to the second coming, there is no unanimity concerning the extent of the devastation of the evil forces. Schüssler Fiorenza, for instance, suggests that the defeat of the evil forces is so complete that all sinful human beings perish, which is why in Rev. 20 Satan gathers an army for himself made up by mythological nations such as Gog and Magog.<sup>139</sup> Others, however, suggest that the imagery represents the defeat of the armies of the nations, not the nations themselves. They allow for the survival of some people so that Satan will be able to deceive them into battle in Rev. 20:7.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1046; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 47.

<sup>137</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1046.

<sup>138</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 193.

<sup>139</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, ed. Gerhard Krodel (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 107.

<sup>140</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 688.

If the imagery of Rev. 19:17-21 is one of the gospel proclamation, then the nations entering new Jerusalem is not a problem but probably a natural consequence. A partial destruction of the nations, such as the defeat of their armies in battle only also allows for a future march of the nations into the new Jerusalem. However, if the image of Rev. 19:17-21 represents the complete destruction of all sinners then the march of the nations into the new Jerusalem indeed presents a seemingly unresolved logical inconsistency.

In this chapter, I will argue that the rider on the white horse is an image of Christ as the Divine Warrior waging an eschatological battle and not one of the spreading of the gospel. I will also argue that the battle is not a fight between God and the armies of the nations, but the confrontation between the Divine Warrior and *all* living unbelieving humans. Previous passages demonstrated that these sinners refused to repent despite the terrible plagues that befell them but chose to blaspheme God instead (Rev. 16:9, 11, 21). In Rev. 19, they receive their punishment.

First, I will place the vision of the rider on the white horse in its immediate context in Revelation. Next, I will attempt to discover the underlying traditions and motifs that John used to make up his narrative. Relevant to our discussion will be not only the similarities between Revelation and these traditions but also the differences and the additions John is making because they underscore his interpretive goals. More consideration will be given to aspects of John's narrative that are more relevant to the fate of the nations.

### 3.1 The rider on the white horse

The close thematic connection between the first two of these visions demands that they should be studied together. The first vision describes the coming of the rider on the white horse to battle the nations, and the second vision is about the aftermath of the battle. There is no doubt about the identity of the rider. He comes from heaven (Rev. 19:11) where the throne of God is located. He is faithful and true (Rev. 19:11), which are also the adjectives that characterize Christ before his introduction to the letter in Laodicea (Rev. 3:14). He wears many crowns (Rev. 19:12) which is a sign of his supreme authority. He is called the "word of God" (Rev. 19:13), a unique title of Jesus also present in the gospel of John (John 1:1), he commands the



armies of heaven that follow him (Rev. 19:14 cf. Rev. 17:14),<sup>141</sup> and out of his mouth comes a sharp sword (Rev. 19:15 cf. Rev. 1:16; 2:12). He strikes and shepherds the nations (Rev. 19:15 cf. Rev. 2:27, Rev. 12:5), and treads the winepress of God's wrath (Rev. 19:15 cf. Rev. 14:19-20), his name is King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16 cf. Rev. 17:14). The titles and the descriptions leave no doubt that the rider on the white horse is the exalted Christ leading the attack on his enemies.<sup>142</sup>

Aune organizes the symbolic description of the rider into three categories. The first category is the physical description of the rider. His eyes are described as flames of fire (v. 12); he wears many diadems on his head (v. 12); his garment is dipped in blood (v. 13); and a sharp sword comes out of his mouth (v. 15).<sup>143</sup> The second category in the symbolic description of the rider is about his identity and names. He is faithful and true (v. 11); he has a name that no one knows but himself (v. 12); he is called the word of God (v. 13) and, last, on his robe and thigh he has written the name "King of kings and Lord of lords" (v. 16).<sup>144</sup> The final category lists the tasks of the rider. He judges in righteousness (v. 11); he wages war in righteousness (v. 11); he strikes the nations with the sharp sword that comes from his mouth (v. 15); he will rule the nations with an iron rod (v. 15); he will tread the wine press of fury of the almighty God (v. 15).<sup>145</sup> Additionally, the vision describes the horse of the rider as white and, finally, the armies that follow the rider mount white horses as well, and wear white clothes.

The image of the rider on the horse is a composite image that brings together most of Christ's titles throughout Revelation. Notably absent is the image of the Lamb,<sup>146</sup> found 29 times in Revelation and in all but one constitutes a reference to Christ.<sup>147</sup> Although the Lamb is present in Rev. 19:7, 9, it is conspicuously absent in the description of the rider on the white horse.<sup>148</sup> The absence of the imagery of the Lamb cannot be explained on the grounds that lambs

<sup>141</sup> The reference does not speak of armies but of those who are with him as *κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί*. Rev. 17:14.

<sup>142</sup> David E. Aune, "An Intertextual Reading of the Apocalypse of John," in *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 142.

<sup>143</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1047.

<sup>144</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1047.

<sup>145</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1047.

<sup>146</sup> Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 384.

<sup>147</sup> Ruben Zimmermann, "Nuptial Imagery in the Revelation of John," *Biblica* 84, no. 2 (2003): 167.

<sup>148</sup> Curiously, Resseguie concludes that the imagery of the Divine Warrior suggests that "[v]ictory is achieved not through traditional warfare but through the testimony of the Lamb" Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 238. The Lamb is mentioned in the nuptial image of Rev. 19:9 before the Divine Warrior theme. After this, the Lamb

are meek or peaceful and therefore inappropriate in describing warriors. In previous passages such as Rev. 6:16; 17:14, the wrath of the Lamb and his military prowess is highlighted, thus making the image a good candidate for describing violent scenes. The imagery of the Lamb in Revelation is not an image of meekness.<sup>149</sup>

The imagery of the Lamb is not included in the description of the rider on the horse probably because of its frequent associations with redemption. In Revelation, the Lamb repeatedly acts as the agent of redemption for God's people. In Rev. 5:8-9, the four animals and the twenty-four elders praise the Lamb as worthy to open the seals because he was slain and bought people from every nation by his blood (ἐσφάγης καὶ ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου). Likewise, in Rev. 7:14 John is told by an elder that the multitude surrounding the throne consists of those who washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου). Last, in Rev 14:4, the 144,000 are those who were purchased (ἡγοράσθησαν) from the people as God's first fruits. The absence of the Lamb imagery therefore suggests that John did not want to attach any themes, titles or pictures to his passage that he has previously associated with redemption or salvation.

### 3.1.1 The rider on the white horse as a Roman triumphal image

Commentators suggest two possible motifs behind the image of the rider on the white horse, the Roman triumph<sup>150</sup> and the eschatological warrior imagery.<sup>151</sup> The Roman triumph imagery is based on the prominence of the white horse of the rider and his followers, the crown worn by the rider, the name or title inscribed on the rider, the "posthumous"<sup>152</sup> character of the rider suggested by his clothes being dipped in blood", the armies that accompany the rider, and the predominant military imagery, which reflects a decisive victory.<sup>153</sup>

Most of the suggested similarities are superficial. The two images also show some notable differences. The most important is the different context. Roman triumphs were celebrated after great victories, or in the case of Hadrian, after the emperor's ascension to the

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reappears again in a nuptial image in Rev. 21:9 in the context of the new earth, but the title is not present in Rev. 19:11-21.

<sup>149</sup> J. A. Bollier, "Judgment in the Apocalypse," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 7, no. 1 (1953): 18.

<sup>150</sup> Alastair Campbell, "Triumph and Delay: The Interpretation of Revelation 19:11-20:10," *Evangelical Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (January 2008): 3-12. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1050-52; Koester, *Revelation*, 762-63.

<sup>151</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1048-50. Koester, *Revelation*, 763-64.

<sup>152</sup> I understand Aune's "posthumous" reference to be to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the rider.

<sup>153</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

throne.<sup>154</sup> In Rev. 19, the image of the rider on the white horse is neither the celebration of victory nor the coronation of a king. It is a prelude to battle. Although the battle's outcome may be predetermined, and the victory of the rider certain, the imagery of the charging rider is that of an attack and a battle, not the celebration of its victory.

The white horse of the rider and his followers are prominent in John's image as well as in the triumphal processions, but as Aune notes, the Roman victor was parading in a chariot drawn by four horses, the *quadriga*,<sup>155</sup> not riding on one. The colour white in the triumphant processions was symbolic of victory, whereas white in Revelation may also be a symbol of "divine holiness ... purity... [and] judicial vindication through judgement"<sup>156</sup> or of the "righteousness of the divine retaliation."<sup>157</sup> The colour white in Revelation seems to have a multivalent range of meanings, not simply that of victory.

In Hadrian's triumphal procession, a slave held a crown over the head of the victor (Hadrian), while the crowns of the defeated kings were presented to the emperor (Trajan) and displayed in the procession.<sup>158</sup> The image is different in Rev. 19. The rider has many crowns upon his head, which are his and do not belong to the defeated enemies simply because he has not engaged in war against them yet. Thus, the many crowns in Revelation are a sign of the rider's complete ownership of the world and the reason why he is the "king of kings and the lord of lords." God's and the Lamb's dominion over all the universe has already been noted in Rev. 4:11 and 5:9-10, 12 because of their creative and redemptive activity. He is not a king who acquires power and land by defeating enemies. The image of the many crowns suggests he is the rightful owner of the world. It has been correctly observed that the many crowns the rider has upon his head are contrasted with the seven crowns of the dragon in Rev. 12:1 and the ten crowns of the beast in Rev. 13:1. The many crowns of the rider are a challenge to the "false claims of universal authority" of the evil powers.<sup>159</sup> Thus even before the battle is won and the spoils of war acquired, the rider has these crowns on his head.

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<sup>154</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>155</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>156</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 950.

<sup>157</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 346.

<sup>158</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>159</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 952.

Aune also sees a possible connection between John's imagery of the rider on the horse and the Roman triumphs because of the posthumous character of the rider suggested by his garment, which is dipped (Rev. 19:13 *βεβαμμένον*<sup>160</sup>) in blood. In Roman times triumphal arches were often erected posthumously to commemorate great victories, as witness Titus' victory in the Jewish war in 70 AD and the erection of his arch posthumously.<sup>161</sup> Sometimes the honoured emperor was posthumously awarded honorary titles that were celebrated in the minting of coins. Specifically, Trajan was given the title Parthicus.<sup>162</sup>

The rider in Rev. 19 does bear several names and designations such as faithful, true, word of God, and King of kings and Lord of lords, including a name that no one knows. However, it is not clear from the image that the award of these names or the character itself is posthumous. As noted earlier, the title of the slain Lamb that most clearly demonstrated Jesus's posthumous character, is conspicuously absent from the passage. None of the other names suggest the rider has previously died and has risen to life again. Aune argues that the clothes of the rider dipped in blood make that suggestion.<sup>163</sup> This is a curious explanation, especially since a few pages later his commentary suggests that the blood on the rider's clothes is not "primarily a metaphor of the atoning death of Christ but rather a literal reference to the heavenly warrior whose garments are stained" with the blood of his enemies.<sup>164</sup> However, since some commentators consider the blood on the rider's clothes to be his own the passage should be studied further.

Boring points out that the rider's clothes are dipped in blood before the battle even begins and therefore are bloody with his self-sacrifice.<sup>165</sup> It is true that in Revelation Christ's blood figures prominently in Rev. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11. Wherever the blood of Christ is mentioned it is clearly defined as such by personal pronouns qualifying it as being Christ's

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<sup>160</sup> Some manuscripts read *ῥεραντισμένον* or other variants of *ῥαντίζειν*; or *περιρραμμένον* or other variants from *ραίνειν*, instead of *βεβαμμένον*. According to Metzger, *βεβαμμένον* seems to be best supported (A 046 051 most miniscules *cop<sup>sa</sup> arm al*). Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 763-64. This reading also best explains the reason the variations that suggest sprinkling were created. The passage is based on Isa. 63:3, where the Divine Warrior's garments are sprinkled (*נִיָּץ*) with blood from God's enemies. It is easier to suppose that a copyist made the passage of Revelation to conform to its source in Isa 63:3 and it is difficult to explain the variation that suggests dipping the garment in blood. Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation* (Macon, Ga: Smyth & Helwys Pub, 2001), 367.

<sup>161</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>162</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>163</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1051.

<sup>164</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1057.

<sup>165</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 196.

(Rev. 1:5 αὐτοῦ, Rev. 5:9 σου) or by the phrase “the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:14; 12:11 αἵματι/αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου.).

Caird suggests that the rider’s bloody garment refers to the blood of the martyrs.<sup>166</sup> John carefully informs the reader, however, when he speaks of the blood of the saints as he did with the blood of Christ. In all the instances referring to the blood of believers, the author clearly defines it as the blood of saints or martyrs. The blood of saints is mentioned in Rev. 6:10; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2. In none of these passages is there any ambiguity as to whose this blood is. In Rev. 6:10, slain martyrs speak of *our* blood (τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν). Rev. 16:6 speaks of the blood of saints and prophets (αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν). Rev. 17:6 speaks of the blood of saints and martyrs of Jesus (αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ). Rev. 18:24 speaks of the blood of prophets and saints (αἷμα προφητῶν καὶ ἁγίων) and, last, Rev. 19:2 speaks of the blood of his [God’s] servants (τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ). All cases clearly indicate whose blood it is.

The remaining instances in which blood appears in Revelation are usually in connection with plagues where blood is used metaphorically (e.g., the moon, the sea or waters turning into blood Rev. 6:12; 8; 8:7; 11:6; 16:3, 4). The only other instance of blood appearing in Revelation (Rev. 14:20) is perhaps the most relevant in identifying the blood of Rev. 19:13. In Rev. 14:20, no pronoun qualifies the blood reference, although the context makes it clear that it is a reference to that of unbelievers at the judgement. Both Rev. 14:20 and Rev. 19:13 are part of passages devoted to judgement and in both passages the imagery of the wine press is present. In fact, the wine press of God (ἡ ληνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) does not appear anywhere else in Revelation.

Later in this study, it will be shown that Isa. 63:1-3 is a passage that John probably used as the basis for his rider on the white horse. In Isa. 63:1, a figure with red clothes comes from Edom and Bozrah. Isa. 63:3 explains that the red colour comes from the blood of his enemies whom he trampled over in anger. This treading is also portrayed in Isa. 63:3 as the crushing of grapes in the winepress. Since the clothes of the background figure that John used was stained by the blood of his enemies, it is reasonable to assume that the blood on the rider’s clothes also belongs to his enemies.

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<sup>166</sup>George Bradford Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 243. Found in Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 345.

It is therefore more likely that the blood on the rider's clothes is not his own or that of his followers. In Revelation, the blood of Jesus and the martyrs is always clearly identified. The imagery of war and judgement along with the presence of the winepress of God suggests that the blood is that of the rider's enemies, an image that "indicates the direction of the event that follows."<sup>167</sup> This conclusion about the blood on the clothes of the rider therefore emphasizes his military activity rather than his posthumous character.

### 3.1.2 The rider on the horse as an image of the Divine Warrior

It was argued above that the image of the Roman triumph is not a clear motif behind the scene of the rider in Rev. 19:11-17. The other motif that Aune suggests, the eschatological warrior, fits John's imagery better.<sup>168</sup> We find the theme of the eschatological warrior in several places in the HB as well as the New Testament. HB passages that deal with the Day of Yahweh or New Testament texts portraying Jesus as coming with the clouds usually contain the eschatological or Divine Warrior theme.<sup>169</sup> As with most of John's images, the motif of the eschatological warrior is complex and exhibits parallels with several passages from the HB and early Judaism and targumic texts in which either God or the messiah is depicted as a warrior.

The closest parallel from the HB is probably the passage from Isa. 63:1-3. The NRSV renders the passage thus:

"Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson? Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in his great might?" "It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save."

"Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?"

"I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their juice spattered on my garments, and stained all my robes."

Rev. 19:11-16 and Isa. 63:1-3 share the concept of a Divine Warrior fighting his enemies. Another motif that appears in both accounts is the clothes of the warrior being described as red stained by the blood of his enemies. Both accounts also describe the fighting

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<sup>167</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 218.

<sup>168</sup> Besides Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1048-50 see also Osborne, *Revelation*, 683; Koester, *Revelation*, 756.

<sup>169</sup> Tremper Longman III, "The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif," *Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (1982): 291.

activity of the warrior as pressing grapes in a wine press. The nations also appear in both accounts. In Isa. 63:6, the warrior claims that he trampled the nations (עַמִּים) in anger. In Revelation, the Divine Warrior is said to have a name that no one knows but himself (Rev. 19:12). The Isa. 63:1-3 description of the warrior does not assign a name to him, although the readers would readily deduce that it is Yahweh, who is praised for his kindness and as the saviour of his people (Isa. 63:7-9). As it stands, however, Isa. 63:1 begins with a rhetorical question as to who that person is. No name is ever supplied. John may subtly allude to this when he claims that the rider has a name known only to himself.

The LXX passage of Isa. also shares several lexical parallels with Rev. 19:11-16. In Rev. 19:11, the rider fights in righteousness and judgement (ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ κρίνει καὶ πολεμεῖ) and in Isa. 63:1 he discourses (or announces) righteousness and judgement (διαλέγομαι δικαιοσύνην καὶ κρίσιν). Both accounts also share the words for the wine press of God (ληνός), the anger of God (θυμός), the clothes (ἱμάτιον), blood (αἷμα) and the treading (πατέω in Rev. 19: 15 and the word compounded with the preposition κατά, καταπατέω in Isa. 63:3).

We also see several differences between the two accounts. First, Rev. 19 portrays the Divine Warrior together with a large army. Isa. 63:3, 5 on the other hand, specifically portrays the warrior alone. It is not that the Isaiah passage is silent on the Warrior's possible assistants; we are told specifically that no man was with the warrior (οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ μετ' ἐμοῦ, Isa 63:3) and that there was no helper, ... no one was assisting (οὐδεὶς βοηθός ... οὐθεις ἀντελαμβάνετο, Isa. 63:5). Another major difference is that the warrior in Rev. 19 *goes* to battle whereas the warrior in Isa. 63 *returns* from the battle.

Beside the differences, there are some additions that John makes to the imagery derived from Isaiah. Revelation, for instance, declares that the rider is faithful and true (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, Rev. 19:11), has many crowns Rev. 19:12, and is called the word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev. 19:13). Rev. 19:12 describes the eyes of the warrior as flaming fire (φλόξ πυρός) and Rev. 19:15 describes the weapon of the warrior as a sharp sword that comes out of his mouth (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα). The theme of shepherding the nations with an iron scepter is also lacking from the description in Isaiah as well as the title “King of kings and Lord of lords”. It is evident that John did not resort to Isa. 63 as the only treasury of images in drafting his Divine Warrior.

Another possible background to the activities of the rider in Rev. 19 is Wis. 18:15,<sup>170</sup> a passage describing the killing of the firstborn during the last plague in Egypt. According to this passage, God's almighty word (παντοδύναμός σου λόγος, Wis. 18:15) leapt from heaven and from God's royal throne (ἀπ' οὐρανῶν ἐκ θρόνων βασιλείων, Wis. 18:15) as a rigorous warrior (ἀπότομος πολεμιστής, Wis. 18:15). The warrior has a sharp sword (ξίφος ὀξύ, Wis. 18:15) which appears to be a metaphor of God's command (τὴν ἀνυπόκριτον ἐπιταγὴν σου φέρων, Wis. 18:15).<sup>171</sup>

The passage also has some other similarities, the most important being the effect of the activity of the warrior. The dead were too many to count (νεκροὺς εἶχον ἀναριθμήτους, Wis. 18:12) and the living were not even able to bury them (οὐδὲ γὰρ πρὸς τὸ θάψαι οἱ ζῶντες ἦσαν ἱκανοί, Wis. 18:12). Yet another similarity is the equality by which the punishment was administered. Slave and master, citizen or king, all received the same punishment (ὁμοίᾳ δὲ δίκῃ δοῦλος ἅμα δεσπότη κολασθεὶς καὶ δημότης βασιλεῖ τὰ αὐτὰ πάσχων, Wis. 18:11). This image is remarkably similar to that of the kings, generals, powerful, free, slave, small and great that lie dead and unburied because of the activity of the rider.<sup>172</sup>

The passage from Wis. 18, however, lacks the winepress of God and the bloodstained clothes that are central to Rev. 19. Moreover, the passage describes the past event of the tenth plague and therefore lacks the eschatological tone of the passage of Revelation. The warrior is not described as mounting a horse either, this detail is also notably lacking from the Isa. 63 passage. Last, close lexical similarities are few and far between.<sup>173</sup> The contribution of Wis. 18 as a background to Rev. 19 seems to be the identification of the warrior with the almighty word of God,<sup>174</sup> the sword as a metaphor of God's command, and the countless dead lying unburied from all sorts of social strata. Since the passage from Wis. 18 does not share many lexical affinities with Rev. 19, it seems fair to conclude that John is not necessarily using that passage but rather other traditions that associated the angel of the tenth plague with a Divine Warrior.

<sup>170</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1049.

<sup>171</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1049. See also Farrer, *The Revelation*, 198.

<sup>172</sup> This imagery is part of the next vision in Rev. 19:18.

<sup>173</sup> Note that even though both passages speak of sword, Rev. 19:15 uses the word *ρόμφαλα*, whereas Wis. 18:15 uses *ξίφος*.

<sup>174</sup> The word *God* is not present in the text, being replaced by the pronoun *σου* (Wis. 18:15).



A midrash on Exod. 15:3-4, the very passage that Wis. 18:15 also commented on, adds further details to the image of the Divine Warrior that are also present in Rev. 19.<sup>175</sup> R. Judah described the arsenal of the warrior using images and metaphors from other passages of the HB. The first image relevant to our study is the girding with the sword (ῥομφαία in LXX) on the warrior's thigh from Ps. 44:4 (LXX ref.). The thigh of the rider is also mentioned in Rev. 19:16, although the reference there serves a different purpose. The appearance of the warrior as a horseman is also relevant. This is a unique feature lacking from all other passages we studied. However, although R. Judah mentioned how the warrior "appeared to them like a horseman", he was not really riding a horse. Based on Ps. 18:10 (17:11 LXX ref.) the rider actually rode upon a cherub and flew.<sup>176</sup> The warrior also appeared in a coat of mail and helmet, and from Isa. 59:17, R. Judah concluded that the warrior put on "righteousness as a coat of mail and a helmet of salvation."<sup>177</sup> Righteousness also defines the rider in Rev. 19:11. Interestingly enough, the midrash also includes the name of the warrior as a weapon. Although the warrior has all these weapons, he fights with his name.<sup>178</sup> Another interesting modification to the original passage of Exod. 15:3-4 is that the enemies are not the Egyptians alone but the nations of the world.

The above midrash was from the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, which is an anthology of early rabbinic interpretation of Exodus. It is usually assumed that the *Mekhilta* was completed and edited by the second half of the fourth century AD at the latest. However, most of these traditions were probably composed and transmitted orally earlier,<sup>179</sup> and thus probably antedate John. At most it can be argued that John used the tradition that underlay the rabbinic views in the *Mekhilta*.

None of the above texts offer any close parallel to the imagery of the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider in Rev. 19:15, 21. As a background for this imagery, Moyise suggests the conflation of two Isaiah texts.<sup>180</sup> The first is Isa. 11:4b (πατάξει γῆν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος

<sup>175</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1049.

<sup>176</sup> Jacob Z. Lauterbach, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 2:188.

<sup>177</sup> Lauterbach, *Mekhilta*, 2:188.

<sup>178</sup> Lauterbach, *Mekhilta*, 2:188.

<sup>179</sup> Lauterbach, *Mekhilta*, 1:ix. The lack of interest of the *Mekhilta* in the construction of the Tabernacle, its utensils and the priestly garments clearly indicates that the book was compiled during a period during which these items had little practical significance in Judaism, probably well after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

<sup>180</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 31.

αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν πνεύματι διὰ χειλέων ἀνελεῖ ἀσεβῆ) and the second Isa. 49:2a (καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸ στόμα μου ὥσει μάχαιραν ὀξεῖαν). The Hebrew text of Isa. 11:4b reads “the rod [וַחֲבֹץ] of his mouth” rather than the “sword of his mouth”. The imagery of a sword coming forth from a mouth is more similar to the image of “a rod of a mouth” of the Hebrew text. It is likely then that John or the tradition he draws upon here depends on the Hebrew text rather than the Septuagint.<sup>181</sup> The two Isaiah texts together project the image of the mouth as a sharp sword (Isa. 49:2a) that will smite the earth (Isa. 11:4b).

Fekkes notes that the image of a Divine Warrior killing his enemies by means of his mouth, breath, word, or rod is very common in Jewish writings.<sup>182</sup> He considers the image almost a “topos”. All the references below contain some sort of variant of that image. In Ps. Sol. 17:24, God’s iron rod will crush (συντρίψαι) all the substance (πᾶσαν ὑπόστασιν) of the sinful nations; by the word of his mouth he will destroy (ὀλεθρεῦσαι) them, and in Ps. Sol. 17:35 he will smite (πατάξει) the earth by the word of his mouth (λόγῳ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ). In 4QpIsa<sup>a</sup> 8-10, the Lord will “and lift its rod [against the sea] [in the fashion of Egypt],”<sup>183</sup> and God kills the wicked with “the power of [His] mouth...with the breath of [His] lips” in 1QSb5 24-25.<sup>184</sup> In 2 Thess. 2:8, Jesus, during the Parousia, kills (ἀνελεῖ) the man of lawlessness by the breath of his mouth. The Messiah<sup>185</sup> comes from the sea and without any weapon of war sends forth from his mouth streams of fire and flaming breath that burns up his enemies in 4 Ezra 13:9-11, 37-38.<sup>186</sup> Last, in 1 En. 62:2 the word of the Lord’s “mouth will do the sinners in; and all the oppressors shall be eliminated from before his face.”<sup>187</sup> Once again the weapon is the mouth of God and the result is the elimination or destruction of sinners.

The eyes of the rider being like flaming fire (φλῶξ πυρός, Rev. 19:12) is probably an allusion to Dan. 10:6 where Daniel encounters a man with eyes like fiery torches (λαμπάδες

<sup>181</sup> Moyise concludes that John in Revelation makes use of both “Greek and Semitic sources and is not solely dependent on either the Greek ... or the Hebrew.” Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 17 n.25.

<sup>182</sup> Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 118.

<sup>183</sup> Florentino Garcia Martinez and Eibert Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition-Two Vol. Set* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 315.

<sup>184</sup> Martinez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, 109.

<sup>185</sup> According to R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 616.

<sup>186</sup> J. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 551.

<sup>187</sup> Isaac, “1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction,” 43.

πυρός). Eyes here denote insight and therefore the image of fiery eyes suggests this rider's penetrating vision will produce a just judgement.<sup>188</sup> This probably suggests that Christ's "judgement is incapable of deception or fraud," not that fire may be a forecast of a negative judgement.<sup>189</sup>

The multiple crowns of the rider is another image not found in the previous passages suggested as backgrounds. This is probably because the image of the multiple crowns is John's creation meant to contrast the rider's head gear with that of the beast and the dragon.<sup>190</sup> Previously in Rev. 12:3 the dragon had been described as wearing seven crowns (διαδήματα) and the beast as having ten crowns (διαδήματα) on his ten horns in Rev. 13:1. In Rev. 19:12, the limited authority of the beast and of the dragon represented by the number of their crowns is contrasted by the rider's many (πολλά) unnumbered crowns.<sup>191</sup>

Next follows the description of the rider's names. Here John gives a contradictory account of his name. First, the rider is called faithful and true (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός) in Rev. 19:11, while in Rev. 19:12 he is said to have a name written that no one knows but himself, and next in Rev. 19:13 he is called the word of God (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). Finally, in Rev. 19:16 another title is revealed which is King of kings and lord of lords (Βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ κύριος κυρίων).

Aune points out that in the magical papyri after statements emphasizing the secrecy of the name of a divinity, that secret name is specifically revealed.<sup>192</sup> Here, however, there is no indication that the secret name of the rider is one of the names that John reveals. Koester notes that names are associated with power and praying in the name of a deity, which suggests calling on that deity's power for help.<sup>193</sup> In fact, the phrase "in the name of Jesus" appears to be a standard formula that initiates miracles in early Christianity.<sup>194</sup> The act of withholding a name suggests that Jesus specifically "prevents others from invoking its powers."<sup>195</sup> It is tempting to suggest that the name being concealed here is that of the Lamb. This name, associated with

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<sup>188</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 681, 166-67.

<sup>189</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Yale Bible v. 38 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975), 313.

<sup>190</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1054.

<sup>191</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 952.

<sup>192</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1055.

<sup>193</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 176.

<sup>194</sup> See Acts 3:6; 16:18; 19:13.

<sup>195</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 176.

sacrifice, redemption and salvation, could be left concealed because the purpose of the rider is not to bring salvation but judgement. But since the name is hidden, we cannot make a definite assertion of what this name signifies.

The rest of the names and designations that are revealed probably have to do with judgement. The adjectives faithful and true appear in the LXX only in 3 Macc. 2:11 (πιστὸς εἰ καὶ ἀληθινός).<sup>196</sup> The context is the prayer of Simon the high priest, who invokes several instances of divine judgement in scriptures such as the flood, the fire on Sodom, the punishment of Pharaoh and the destruction of his army in the Red Sea (3 Macc. 2:3-7). “Faithful and true” therefore are God’s qualities as he defends his honour “by judging Israel’s persecutors.”<sup>197</sup> Once again, John’s additions evoke associations with passages related to divine judgement and punishment.

The last name/title of the rider is the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev. 19:16). The name is taken from Dan. 4:37, in which the pagan king of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar repents and acknowledges the power and dominion of Yahweh. The name of the rider essentially foretells the outcome of the battle. Even though the kings of the earth have gathered to fight, the victory will be Christ’s.

Rev. 19:15 describes three violent images of the rider’s actions that result in death and the utter defeat of God’s enemies. The first is the sword out of the rider’s mouth by which he strikes down the nations. Caird points to Isa. 49: 2 as the background for the symbolism of this sword.<sup>198</sup> He claims that “the only weapon the Rider needs, if he is to break the opposition of his enemies, and establish God’s reign of justice and peace, is the proclamation of the gospel.”<sup>199</sup> However, this is only half of the picture, as we noted. John complements this image with Isa. 11:4b, which is more dominant in the passage. John’s addition from Isa. 49:2 does not soften the violent imagery of Isa. 11:4b, he is heightening it because he adds the “sharp sword” to the image. Last, “the sword of his mouth” in Rev. 19:15 does not serve any missionary purpose. Quite the contrary, it functions as an additional weapon in the arsenal of the rider with which to strike down the nations. This is proven conclusively when in Rev. 19:21 John

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<sup>196</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 950.

<sup>197</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 950.

<sup>198</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 245.

<sup>199</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 245.

explicitly writes that the rest, those not thrown into the lake of fire, were killed (ἀπεκτάνθησαν) by the sword that comes forth from the mouth of the rider.

The second image of Rev. 19:15 also supports our previous conclusion. The iron rod by which the rider shepherds the nations cannot be thought of as an image of care or even discipline. As Osborne points out, the “iron sceptre is actually the shepherd’s club that kills the enemies of the sheep...so this has the same force as the sharp sword in the previous image.”<sup>200</sup> John is alluding to Ps. 2:9, a passage he has already referred to twice before (Rev. 2:27; 12:5). According to Mowinckel, Ps. 2 describes the enthronement of a new king in Israel who is represented as a universal king.<sup>201</sup> Krodol adds that in “ancient Near Eastern coronation rituals, earthen pots with the names of enemies inscribed on them were smashed to symbolize the future victory of the king.”<sup>202</sup> Ps. 2 refers to this ritual, asserting that the vassal kings and their nations may be preparing a rebellion, but it will be crushed swiftly. The image of the nations being shepherded by an iron rod and being crushed like pottery vessels (Ps. 2:9) is used to depict the squashing of that rebellion.<sup>203</sup> Charles, who analyses the way John uses the word ποιμανεῖ, proposes that it has a dual significance. One is the normal usage in Greek literature which is “to pasture”, or “to shepherd.” However, the word ποιμανεῖ also frequently translates רעה in the LXX, which besides pasturing also means “to devastate” as in Ps. 49:14; Jer. 2:16; Micah 5:5.<sup>204</sup> Charles thus concludes that the clear parallelism of ποιμαίνειν and πατάσσειν in Rev. 19:15 suggests that John uses ποιμαίνειν in its secondary sense of to devastate.<sup>205</sup>

This conclusion is also supported by the last image of the rider treading the wine press of God, which was mentioned earlier in Rev. 14:19-20. The pressing of the grapes there yielded

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<sup>200</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 685. For a secondary meaning of ποιμαίνω as to rule or destroy, see Micah 5:6 and Jer. 22:22. Koester adds that rulers were often depicted as holding a rod that indicated the administration of justice and punishment. The fact that the rod is made of iron suggests that it could inflict severe damage and death. Koester, *Revelation*, 302.

<sup>201</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 75.

<sup>202</sup> Gerhard A. Krodol, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 129.

<sup>203</sup> This is a contrasting image to Rev. 7:17 where once more the verb to shepherd (ποιμαίνω) occurs. The difference is that Rev. 7:17 probably alludes to Ps. 23:1-2 in which God is the good shepherd. There is no iron rod in Rev. 7:17, just leading to quiet waters. The nature of the setting is not defined by the verb to shepherd but by the means of shepherding. An iron rod that crushes suggests harsh treatment, whereas leading to a spring of living waters suggests gentle care.

<sup>204</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 75-76. See also BDB, s.v. “רעה.”

<sup>205</sup> Aune Osborne and Beale also agree with this analysis. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 211; Osborne, *Revelation*, 166. Beale writes: “‘Destroy’ is clearly the primary nuance of the word in Rev. 19:15.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 962.

not wine but blood as high as the horses' bridles (ἐξῆλθεν αἷμα ἐκ τῆς ληνοῦ ἄχρι τῶν χαλινῶν τῶν ἵππων, Rev. 14:20). The point of the metaphor is again to offer a negative image of judgement, not one of salvation.<sup>206</sup> Therefore, all three metaphors that John uses to describe the actions of the Divine Warrior against the nations denote destruction not pasturing or care.

A dissenting voice on the notion that ποιμαίνειν denotes destruction in the context of Rev. 2:27 and 19:15 comes from Morales, who discusses the shepherding metaphor in the background literature (Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, biblical and intertestamental), concluding that the shepherd represented a person who was the “protector of the flock”, “responsible”, “considerate”, “strong”, and “intelligent”.<sup>207</sup> Morales rejects the notion that ποιμαίνειν may refer to devastation, “subjugation” or even “negative rule”.<sup>208</sup> He uses five arguments to claim that the word may refer to shepherding, protecting, caring or even ruling.<sup>209</sup>

Before the account of Morales' arguments, it is important to note one instance in the NT where the action of a shepherd, namely judgement, brings destruction to part of his flock. It is a parable in Matt. 25:31-46 that Morales fails to discuss in detail.<sup>210</sup> The Son of Man as a shepherd (ποιμήν, Matt. 25:32) features prominently in the parable and he performs the basic shepherding task of separating the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25:32). At the conclusion of the shepherd's judgement, the goats which are placed at his left side (Matt. 25:33), are thrown into the eternal fire (εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, Matt. 25:41). In this passage the shepherding activity results in a judgement that has destructive results for part of the flock. Consequently, Morales' conclusion that the shepherd was *always* portrayed as one who protects the flock is not accurate.

There are also some issues with Morales' five other arguments. First, Morales rejects the notion of a secondary meaning of ποιμαίνω in the Greek. He examines the referents of the word in the LXX and the NT and concludes such a secondary meaning does not exist. He concedes that Jer. 6:3 and Mic. 5:6 are in a negative context, but argues that other factors bring the devastation into view.<sup>211</sup> Jer. 6:3 portrays the foreign generals as shepherds who station their troops as flocks outside Jerusalem which in turn is portrayed as an unprotected field to be

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<sup>206</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 347.

<sup>207</sup> Jon Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations: The Nations as Narrative Character and Audience in John's Apocalypse*, Library of the New Testament Studies (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 47.

<sup>208</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 59.

<sup>209</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 59-62.

<sup>210</sup> The passage only receives cursory attention in Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 66.

<sup>211</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 59.

grazed. Morales argues that the shepherding metaphor here is used in the traditional caring sense since the foreign generals care for their troops.<sup>212</sup> Jeremiah's audience, however, were not the Babylonian troops but the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Even if we assume that ποιμαίνω here refers to "care" for the Babylonian troops, that "care" signifies the devastation of Jerusalem for the readers of Jeremiah. It is difficult to deny this fact.

For the next passage, Mic. 5:6 (Mic. 5:5 LXX), Morales argues that when the prophet claims that ποιμανοῦσιν τὸν Ἀσσυρίαν ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ (they will shepherd Assyria by the sword) the destructive image of the metaphor is not derived from the verb ποιμανοῦσιν but rather from ῥομφαία. He thus argues that the negativity is not part of the verb to shepherd but rather comes from the context. Even if Morales' argument is correct, it should be noted that the context of both Rev. 2:27 and Rev. 19:15 both carry such negative images. In Rev. 2:27, the shepherding metaphor is accompanied by the imagery of Christ crushing the nations like pieces of pottery (ὡς τὰ σκεύη τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται). In Rev. 19:15, as mentioned earlier, the shepherding is performed by an iron sceptre and the metaphor is sandwiched between two other powerfully violent metaphors. In fact, the very word ῥομφαία, used to depict destruction in Mic. 5:5, is also present in Rev. 19:15.

Second, Morales claims that in Rev. 2:27 the usage of συντρίβω does not require the devastation of the nations. In a footnote, he cites Louw and Nida, who mention Luke 9:39 as an example in which συντρίβω does not mean destruction. In addition, Morales refers to Sweet who claims that the breaking of the clay vessels evokes Jer. 19:11 and Jer. 18:1-11 which passages may also infer reconstruction.<sup>213</sup> With regard to Jer. 19:11 in particular, Morales concludes that utter destruction is not in view because the verb συντρίβω is applied to the broken flask that symbolizes Judah.<sup>214</sup>

I find that the fate of Judah and its eventual historical restoration irrelevant to the discussion of the meaning of συντρίβω. Jeremiah could have erred in his prediction. Whether or not Jeremiah meant an irreversible destruction should be discerned from the context of his words. Jer. 19:11 reads ...συντρίψω τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ τὴν πόλιν ταύτην καθὼς συντρίβεται ἄγγος ὁσπράκινον ὃ οὐ δυνήσεται ἰαθῆναι ἔτι (I will crush this people and this city as a clay vessel

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<sup>212</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 54.

<sup>213</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 96.

<sup>214</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 60.

is crushed that can no longer be repaired). The very point of the crushing the jar metaphor is that it cannot be repaired once destroyed.<sup>215</sup>

For his third argument, Morales points out that in Rev. 7:17 the word ποιμαίνω is clearly positive. He maintains that when interpreters jump from Rev. 2:27 to Rev. 19:15 without carefully going through the narrative they fail to understand the relationship between the nations and the other characters of the plot.<sup>216</sup> There is no doubt that in Rev. 7:17 ποιμαίνω is used in an ameliorative sense. However, it is also clear that the context of this passage is different than the context of both Rev. 2:27 and Rev. 19:15. When interpreters argue that ποιμαίνω may refer to destruction, they do not assert that it always does so. They claim that it may refer to destruction when the context demands it. Rev. 7:17 does not contain images of destruction, swords, iron rods, winepress treading or crushing. In addition, Rev. 7:17 alludes to Ps. 23:1-2, not to Ps. 2:9.<sup>217</sup> It appears that Morales emphasizes the semantic significance of ποιμαίνω at the expense of the context that modifies it.

For his fourth argument, Morales claims that because the nations are introduced in the story for the first time in Rev. 2:27 it is not evident that they function as “enemies” in John’s narrative, and therefore the reader should not assume that John treated them as hostile.<sup>218</sup> Even if this argument is valid for Rev. 2:27, it can hardly work for Rev. 19:15. By that time, John has described the beast as exercising his authority on the nations (Rev. 13:7), Babylon has shared with them the “wine of the wrath of her fornications” (Rev. 14:8), the nations represented as waters have supported Babylon (Rev. 17:15), and through her sorceries all the nations have been deceived (Rev. 18:23). The judgement of the nations in Rev. 19:15 does not come as a surprise but rather as a natural consequence.

Last, Morales claims that ποιμαίνω, in the texts he has surveyed, does not have an enemy as its object, conceding that the only exception is perhaps Mic. 5:6.<sup>219</sup> To “shepherd the Assyrians by the sword” (ποιμανοῦσιν τὸν Ἀσσοῦρ ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ, Mic. 5:5 LXX ref.) certainly qualifies as a hostile subject-object relationship. More significantly, however, for our study is the fact that the rider on the white horse shepherds the nations in Rev. 19:15, who are portrayed

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<sup>215</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 192.

<sup>216</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 61.

<sup>217</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 423.

<sup>218</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 61.

<sup>219</sup> Morales, *Christ, Shepherd of the Nations*, 61.



as the rider's enemies. First, the rider is portrayed as a warrior riding his horse. He is accompanied by the armies of heaven (τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, Rev. 19:14). Not only are the rider and his allies described in military terms, but those who have gathered against him are also depicted as armies levied to make war against the rider and his armies (καὶ τὰ στρατεύματα αὐτῶν συνηγμένα ποιῆσαι τὸν πόλεμον μετὰ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ στρατεύματος αὐτοῦ, Rev. 19:19). The sword that comes forth from the mouth of the rider, through which he will strike the nations (...ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, Rev. 19:15) ends up killing those who fought against the warrior (Rev. 19:21). It is clear that ποιμαίνω in Rev. 19:15 has the enemies of the rider as its object. Morales's correct observations on the mostly positive view of shepherding in other contexts cannot possibly be applied in Rev. 19:15. These nations, in this context, are the rider's enemies. He will strike them (πατάσσω) with the sword that comes from his mouth. Indeed, this sword will kill (ἀποκτείνω) the rider's enemies (Rev. 19:21).

### 3.1.3 Conclusion

The analysis of John's sources and the way they were used in Revelation reveals his rhetorical goals. The motif of the Divine Warrior descending from heaven to bring judgement fits the context of Revelation best. As a basis for this motif, John chose Isa. 63:1-3. It has been suggested that his image of the rider on the white horse is one of judgement and redemption. This theory is based on the bloody clothes of the rider, his name as the word of God, the image of the sword coming from his mouth, and his unique shepherding activity. It is claimed that the robe of the rider is dipped in his own blood and is therefore an allusion to his redemptive sacrifice.<sup>220</sup> Likewise, it is suggested that the phrase "word of God" is a reference to his "communicating the will of God to people."<sup>221</sup> The metaphor of the sword as coming from the mouth of the rider has also been interpreted as an image of the prophetic word coming from his mouth.<sup>222</sup> Last, the rider's shepherding has been seen as allusions to Ps. 23 and therefore an image of firm but gentle care.<sup>223</sup>

The careful study of the background of these images, however, yielded different results. The blood on the clothes of the rider is not his own nor that of his followers. When the blood

<sup>220</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 176; Boring, *Revelation*, 196.

<sup>221</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 176.

<sup>222</sup> Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 192.

<sup>223</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 196.

of Jesus or his followers is mentioned in Revelation, it is always carefully identified as such. The passage is a reference to Rev. 14:20 where the blood of the judged sinners flowed from the winepress of God. The image of the blood-stained clothes is also a clear allusion to Isa. 63 in which the blood is that of his enemies, not of Yahweh.

The metaphor of the sword coming from the mouth of the rider likewise is not an image of prophetic teaching. John's reference text is Isa. 11:4, which speaks of the "rod of his mouth" and is conflated with Isa. 49:2. In the process, John's changing the rod to a sword means that his purpose was not to soften the violent language but to intensify it. Furthermore, later in Rev. 19:21 the sword that came from the mouth of the rider specifically kills his enemies; it does not convict or convert them.

It was also noted that either the word of God or the mouth of God in many Jewish and Christian writings were thought of as means of punishing the sinners. The suggestion that the name the "word of God" is simply an image signifying that the rider will communicate God's will to his people overlooks the rich background of divine judgement lying behind that phrase.

Last, it was shown that the imagery of shepherding does not refer to God's gentle care but is rather an allusion to Ps. 2:9. The emphasis is not on the act of shepherding, but on the instrument by which the rider shepherds. The iron rod alludes to crushing the conspiratorial enemies of God, not to leading them to repentance. The other designations of the rider, faithful and true, King of kings and Lord of lords, as well as his having eyes like flaming fire and "judging in righteousness" also highlight the judgement motif that permeates the passage.

This means that all the images usually seen as being of salvation in Rev. 19:11-16 are in fact those of judgement and punishment. More importantly, when the underlying source material of John is considered this image of judgement is not ameliorated but exacerbated. The findings of this study are also verified by the next vision in Rev. 19:17-21. The charge of the rider leaves the earth replete with dead bodies. No image of salvation follows the rider, no hymns of rejoicing are sung among the redeemed. The question that remains then is the extent of the devastation. Has the rider killed only the armies of the nations or all the wicked inhabitants of the earth? To answer this question, we will have to turn our attention to the next vision that describes the aftermath of the battle.

### 3.2 The aftermath of the battle

As soon as the description of the Divine Warrior ends, John jumps to the end of the battle. The reader, excited by the military description of Christ, anticipates a battle only to be taken to the aftermath of the war. This paradoxical order is further highlighted when the reader in Rev. 19:19 is told that the enemies of God, the beast, the kings and their armies, are gathered for war and are very much alive, at least for a while. Roloff describes Rev. 19:17-18 as a small interlude demonstrating that the battle was already decided before it has even begun.<sup>224</sup> Clearly that interlude is chronologically misplaced.

The reverse temporal order is a regular feature in John's writing. John often inverts the natural course of events presenting the outcome before describing the process that brought about the result. The device describing the later event earlier is usually called *hysteron proteron*.<sup>225</sup> This literary device can be a displacement within a single sentence, paragraph, or the insertion of longer episodes that belong to a different time frame.<sup>226</sup> An example of a reverse order within a sentence is Rev. 5:2b: "who is worthy to open the book and break its seals?" The logical sequence would be first to break the seals and then to open the book.<sup>227</sup> A variant of this violation of the chronological order of events occurs in Rev. 11:7 where the beast "that ascends from the abyss" makes war against the two witness even though its ascent will be described much later in Rev. 13:1. Clearly, Rev. 13:1 would chronologically precede the story of Rev. 11:7. There is no sufficient reason to assume that this is a later redaction designed to tie the two passages closer together as Aune supposes.<sup>228</sup> John more likely consciously inverts the chronological sequence in order to make a point. In this case, he announces in advance "the thematic focus of the second part of the vision, beginning with Rev. 12:1, and ties it into what has happened heretofore."<sup>229</sup> Such examples will also be encountered in later passages of Rev. 20.

Rev. 19:17 begins with the image of an angel standing *on* or *in* the sun (ἐν τῷ ἡλίῳ). Beale claims the passage is related to Rev. 18:1-2 in which another angel makes a loud

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<sup>224</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 220.

<sup>225</sup> Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 243.

<sup>226</sup> Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 243

<sup>227</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 347.

<sup>228</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 616.

<sup>229</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 133.

announcement of judgement that is somehow also related to birds.<sup>230</sup> The verbal parallels include εἶδον, ἄγγελον, ἔκραξεν, φωνῇ, and ὄρνεον. The sun is not present in the Rev. 18 narrative, although the passage explicitly describes the radiance of the angel as illuminating the whole earth. Whereas in Rev. 18:1-3 the angel declares the judgement and desolation of Babylon, Rev. 19:7-8 announces the destruction of the beast, the false prophet, and their armies.<sup>231</sup>

The sun in Revelation is a metaphor used for extreme brightness and splendor (Rev. 1:16, 10:1; 12:1). Severe plagues are often directed against the sun's radiance (Rev. 6:12; 8:12; 9:2). Besides brightness, the sun is also an instrument for scorching unbelievers, although God's people are protected (Rev. 7:16; 16:8). This means that once more the brightness of the sun, though presented negatively, is part of the significance of the imagery. In two instances, the sun is used in connection with the east (ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου) (Rev. 7:2; 16:12). Last, the brightness of the sun is rendered obsolete in the context of the new Jerusalem due to God's glory and brightness (Rev. 21:23; 22:5). It is evident that the primary defining characteristic of the sun is its radiance and brightness. In Rev. 19:17, the appearance of the angel in the sun probably invokes the sun's brilliance and splendor, making it an appropriate location to proclaim God's victory over the beast.<sup>232</sup>

The angel does not address humans but the carrion-eating birds (Rev. 19:17). This is the only time in Revelation that an angel addresses animals or birds. Usually, angels in Revelation have a message to John (e.g., Rev. 1:1; 10:5-6), churches (e.g., Rev. 2:1, 8, 12),<sup>233</sup> beings in heaven or other angels (e.g., Rev. 5:2; 7:2), or to all the inhabitants of the earth; believers or non-believers (Rev. 14:6, 9), but never do they convey a message to non-human recipients with the exception of Rev. 19:17. The setting may suggest that there are no survivors present to be addressed after the battle ends. All God's enemies are dead, only scavenging birds remaining to consume the defeated armies. This is a crucial question as regards to the fate of the nations. A battle without survivors does not allow the possibility of a second chance for salvation during the millennium. This also highlights the problem of the future binding of Satan in Rev. 20:3 "so that he will not deceive the nations any more..."<sup>234</sup> as well as the problem of where Satan finds

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<sup>230</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

<sup>231</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 687.

<sup>232</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 348.

<sup>233</sup> The phrase "τῷ ἄγγέλῳ" suggests that the messages to the churches are portrayed as sent via the angel. Osborne, *Revelation*, 110.

<sup>234</sup> See White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 321.

his armies for the last battle in Rev. 20:8.<sup>235</sup> These are problems that will have to be dealt with in the following chapters of this study.<sup>236</sup> Here, it is crucial to investigate John's imagery in order to discover the extent of the devastation that he envisions.

As we saw, the angel invites the carrion-feeding birds to the great supper of God (τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ) in Rev. 19:17. The invitation stands in stark contrast to what the angel told John about the marriage supper of the Lamb (τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἀρνίου) in Rev. 19:9.<sup>237</sup> The contrast between these images is important in juxtaposing the wicked nations with the faithful saints. This means that for John, the armies of the beast and the false prophets are not simply their soldiers,<sup>238</sup> but an image of all the unfaithful who have been deceived by the beast and taken his mark. For Revelation, there will be two classes of people at the end of the world—the believers who will take part in the marriage supper of the Lamb and the unbelievers who will be served as supper to the carrion-feeding birds.<sup>239</sup> The armies gathered to fight against the rider in Rev. 19:11-21 are no more soldiers than the believers are the bride of the Lamb or the guests in an actual wedding in Rev. 19:7-9. Such a dualistic view of the end is not foreign to the apocalyptic genre but a frequent feature of it.<sup>240</sup>

The call for the birds to eat the corpses of the dead paints a particularly “grim picture” that is “taken directly from the Old Testament.”<sup>241</sup> The source material behind John's image is Ezekiel's oracle against Gog. As indicated in the previous chapter, John uses motifs from the Gog oracle in both Rev. 19:17-18 and Rev. 20:7-10. It is therefore important to see how he uses this oracle in Revelation. Block divides the Ezekiel oracles to Gog into two parallel “panels”; one describes the defeat of Gog and the other describes the disposal of Gog.<sup>242</sup> In Rev. 19:17, John borrows material from the disposal of Gog; that is, the aftermath of its destruction. Whereas in Ezek. 39:17 the prophet calls the birds and the beasts (LXX θηρία) to gather and devour the fallen enemies, Rev. 19:17-18 omits the reference to the beasts possibly to avoid

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<sup>235</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 688.

<sup>236</sup> See chapter 5.4.

<sup>237</sup> Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 387; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 276.

<sup>238</sup> Contra Osborne, *Revelation*, 688. Likewise Beasley-Murray disagrees with the notion that all the world is divided into two groups. George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1974), 282.

<sup>239</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 767.

<sup>240</sup> Hellholm, “The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre,” 22.

<sup>241</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:184; Roloff, *Revelation*, 220.

<sup>242</sup> Daniel I Block, “Gog in Prophetic Tradition: A New Look at Ezekiel XXXVIII:17,” *Vetus Testamentum* 42, no. 2 (April 1992): 157.

confusion with the beast that will be thrown in the lake of fire later.<sup>243</sup> Revelation also calls the meal a supper (δεῖπνον) after using traditions underlying passages such as Isa. 25: 6 and not sacrifice (θυσίαν) as Ezek. 39:17.<sup>244</sup> John's intent is seemingly to make the contrast with the marriage supper of the Lamb previously noted.

In addition to the theme of summoning the birds to eat the defeated foes, Revelation borrows the notion of listing groups of dead people who will be eaten after that battle from Ezekiel. Ezekiel's list includes the mighty, princes of the earth, horses, charioteers, warriors and all kinds of soldiers (Ezek. 39:18-20). In Rev. 19:18, the birds' menu includes the flesh of kings, generals,<sup>245</sup> the mighty, the flesh of horses and riders, as well as the flesh of free and slaves or small and great [people]. Ezekiel's list is exclusively military. In contrast, John's list in Rev. includes classes not necessary involved in the military besides military personnel. These are the free and the slaves, the small and the great. Koester attempts to explain these classes as militant groups as well, pointing out that free men were recruited as soldiers but in dire situations slaves were also armed in order to increase troop strength.<sup>246</sup> Koester also understands "the small and great" as people from various social strata who would oppose God and "meet the same fate" at the end.<sup>247</sup>

Pliny's correspondence with Trajan demonstrates that free people were normally recruited as soldiers,<sup>248</sup> but the passage also establishes that Trajan thought the fact that two slaves were recruited was a crime worthy of punishment. The emperor's directions were that if the slaves were picked out then this was the mistake of the recruiting officer; if they were offered as substitutes the fault lay with those who offered them. Last, if the slaves knowing they were slaves had offered to serve then the fault lay with them. Trajan's point seems to be that two slaves enlisting in the service was a crime for which someone was responsible and had to be punished. This means that slaves serving was the exception and not the rule. Indeed, the examples Koester provides from Caesar, *Bell. civ.* 1:24 and Livy, *Rom. Hist.* 22.59.11-12 refer to extraordinary circumstances.<sup>249</sup> The passage of Rev. 19:17-21 shows no indication that the

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<sup>243</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 759.

<sup>244</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 81.

<sup>245</sup> "Generals" is a translation of χιλιάρχοι. The word suggests a leader of a thousand men equivalent to the Latin designation of *tribunus militum*. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1064.

<sup>246</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 767.

<sup>247</sup> Koester, 767.

<sup>248</sup> Plin. *Ep.* 10.29-30.

<sup>249</sup> The first passage is about Pompey's rush to muster an army against Caesar and the second is about eight thousand slaves recruited to fight Hannibal.

beast and the kings of the earth attempted such desperate conscription. The reason for this is probably that John is not describing an actual war between two armies but the divine retribution on the wicked. When John speaks of “free and slaves, small and great” he universalizes Ezekiel’s limited prophecy, making it about all the unbelievers.<sup>250</sup>

The notion that John uses the phrase “free and slaves, small and great” from Rev. 19:18 to refer to unbelievers in their entirety, and not simply to soldiers, is supported from John’s other usages of part of this phrase in Revelation. Apart from Rev. 19:18, the phrase “small and great” appears four more times in Rev. 11:18; 13:16; 19:5 and 20:12. It is noteworthy that in none of these cases does it refer to soldiers or to armies.

In Rev. 11:18, the phrase appears in the context of judgement and divine reward and vengeance. The passage speaks of God’s reward “to your servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name, [both] the small and the great, and destroy those who destroy the earth” (τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου, τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους, καὶ διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν, Rev. 11:18). The phrase “and those who fear your name, [both] the small and the great” is probably exegetical, enlarging upon the prophets and the saints.<sup>251</sup> Koester aptly observes that the expression “the small and the great” means social status and that Revelation recognizes that social status does not determine belief or unbelief.<sup>252</sup>

In contrast, Rev. 13:16 applies “the small and the great” to unbelievers; those who will receive the mark of the beast. The passage includes “the free and the slaves,” also present in Rev. 19:18. Once again, the context of Rev. 13:16 is not military. John does not describe the armies of the beast but rather those who will follow the beast, take his mark and worship his image. The phrase reveals the universal scope and character of the followers of this anti-Christian kingdom by coupling “society’s opposites – small and great, rich and poor, free and slave-signifying everyone.”<sup>253</sup>

In Rev. 19:5, the phrase “the small and the great” is once again used in a universal way, this time to describe believers. The context is that of heavenly worship and Morris claims that both the word all, (πάντες) and the phrase “the small and the great” denote the “universality of

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<sup>250</sup> On John’s tendency to apply to the world what the HB applied only to other entities, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 91-92.

<sup>251</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 163.

<sup>252</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 516.

<sup>253</sup> Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 173.

the appeal.”<sup>254</sup> The last occasion on which the phrase appears is Rev. 20:12. Here too, the context is not military, but a description of the judgement. This passage contains the only variation of the phrase, in that John mentions first the great and then the small *τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικροὺς*. This variation does not appear to be significant.<sup>255</sup>

This brief analysis confirms that when John speaks in Rev. 19:18 of “free and slaves, small and great” he is not actually describing God’s enemies in military terms. He rather universalizes his language to reveal that underlying the battle between the Divine Warrior and the beast lies the largest conflict between good and evil and the judgement. This conflict is not fought with conscript armies, taking place between the followers of the beast and the Divine Warrior. Neither are there spectators in this war, all humanity being involved. The phrase “great and small” on both sides of the war demonstrates that both sides include humans from all social strata in their ranks and all humans somehow need to belong to one of these sides.<sup>256</sup>

Nonetheless, there is another way to interpret “great and small”. Even though John was not referring to soldiers, he may actually simply have been emphasizing the fact that God shows no favouritism and will not distinguish between kings or slaves in the final war.<sup>257</sup> This view allows the “ranks” of Rev. 19:18 to include non-military people but understands the word *πάντων* (all) as not indicating *all* people but *all kinds of* people.<sup>258</sup> The problem with this view is that although it recognizes the true nature of this eschatological war, it allows for a class of people to be somehow neutral in this conflict. On the one side are believers, saints or God-fearers, on another the enemies of God, and on a yet another hypothetical side people who are neither. Revelation, however, does not seem to have such an understanding of the final days. As Boring pertinently observes in his discussion of Rev. 13, “for John, there are only these two groups, these two choices – everyone bears one mark or the other, and conspicuously! There are no anonymous Christians, no middle-of-the-road, no non-aligned.”<sup>259</sup> This means that all non-believers, whether they know it or not, are in the ranks of the beast and according to John

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<sup>254</sup> Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 226.

<sup>255</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 364.

<sup>256</sup> See Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35.

<sup>257</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 447. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 349.

<sup>258</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 349.

<sup>259</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 161.



will perish in this battle.<sup>260</sup> Exempt are only the saints who will attend the other eschatological feast.<sup>261</sup>

Another reason why Rev. 19:17-18 depicts the *universal* destruction of sinners is found in the imagery it creates. As noted, John borrows his image from the Gog oracle in Ezekiel 39. After the devastating defeat of the armies of Gog, Ezek. 39:11-16 describes the Israelites who “go out en masse to bury the remains of Gog’s armies.”<sup>262</sup> Their task, however, is so great that it is impossible for the Israelites to bury the dead before the beasts or birds eat them.<sup>263</sup> The unburied dead therefore signify not only the numbers of the dead but also the people’s inability to bury them. John reworks this picture. Israel and the believers are not part of this image. John does not hint that there will be any burying at all, a very important motif in Ezek. 19:11-16. Block relates that according to Ezekiel “a standing commission shall be appointed to supervise the burial of Gog’s remains. These men shall pass up and down the length of the land for seven months, inspecting every corner for remnants ... [w]hensoever the inspectors discover so much as a bone of the enemy on the surface of the ground, they are to mark the spot with a signpost. Finally, sextons shall follow the supervisors, and transport the bones to the Valley of Hamon-Gog to be buried.”<sup>264</sup> This elaborate and methodical system, intended to ensure all the dead are buried, is completely lacking from Rev. 19. Its absence strongly suggests that no burial takes place because there are no undertakers to dispose of the bodies properly. Israel and the believers are not in the picture, but neither are any possible “neutral” unbelievers present. Indeed, in John’s mind there was never such a class. Only the carrion-feeding birds are left to clear the corpses of the defeated enemies of God.

Another major theme of Ezek. 39, absent from Rev. 19, is that the nations see the punishment of those who waged war against Israel and learnt their lesson not to attack God’s people (see Ezek. 39:7-8; 21-24). In Ezek. 39, the purpose of God’s overwhelming victory is to display Yahweh’s power to the nations. “The battle against Gog reveals to the world that Gog ... is utterly under the control of Yahweh. In this context, then, Yahweh’s holiness implies his

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<sup>260</sup> Mealy puts this as follows: “Who participates in the battle against the returning Christ and his armies? The answer to this question is both clear and consistent with everything that has gone before: every single person remaining on earth participates.” Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 90.

<sup>261</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 240.

<sup>262</sup> Daniel I Block, “Gog and Magog in Ezekiel’s Eschatological Vision,” in *Beyond the River Chebar: Studies in Kingship and Eschatology in the Book of Ezekiel* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2014), 118.

<sup>263</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel, Daniel*, trans. M. G. Easton, vol. 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 339.

<sup>264</sup> Block, “Gog and Magog,” 119.

control of even the earth's empires."<sup>265</sup> No such theme occurs in Revelation. There is no record in John's account that the nations learn anything from this attack. The implication is that in John's eschatological scenario there are no survivors to learn anything from the failed battle against the Divine Warrior.

The above observations verify Moyise's statements on the use of the oracle of Gog in Revelation. Moyise remarks that despite the great similarities between the two accounts the variations are no less significant. While John makes the reader associate Ezekiel's prophecies with his own, he confronts the reader with "drastic changes."<sup>266</sup> The aim is to encourage the reader to stop and pay attention to these changes and examine the new passages as presented through the lens of Revelation.<sup>267</sup> The absence of the burial imagery for the defeated foes of the Divine Warrior in Revelation, as well as the absence of any lessons learnt by survivors, suggests that John reworked that image, presenting it in the light of his own understanding of the conditions for the end. John's differences from Ezekiel should not be overlooked. Their omissions highlight themes that were incompatible with his view about the end.

A further argument which proves that the devastation of the war in Rev. 19:11-21 is universal is found in the next unit in Rev. 19:21. John claims that the "rest were killed by the sword..." (οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ...). The word λοιποὶ leaves no room for yet other survivors.<sup>268</sup> John's image is remarkably similar to 1 En. 1:7, in which Enoch affirms that after the glorious coming of the Lord "everything that is on the earth will perish" (καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀπολείται). The "everything" seems to include the watchers, their offspring, and all mankind.<sup>269</sup> Exempt from this destruction are the righteous (see 1 En. 1:8).

Mealy provides a possible reason for John's motives for obliterating all life from his final vision, claiming that in the face of martyrdom some believers may be tempted to think they may stand a better chance for survival in the ranks of the enemy. However, by predicting

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<sup>265</sup> Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2005), 473-74.

<sup>266</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 82.

<sup>267</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 82.

<sup>268</sup> So Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107; Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 91; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1101; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 980. For an opposing view, see McNicol, who argues that Rev. 19:11-21 is the description of the aftermath of a battle not the obliteration of humankind. McNicol claims that Rev. 19:17-21 echoes Rev. 17:14 and therefore describes the battle of 'kings of the earth' against the Lamb based on Psalm 2. However, the "Lamb" does not appear in Rev. 19:11-21, and the dead are not simply kings but also "...free and slaves, small and great" (Rev. 19:18).

<sup>269</sup> Matthew Black, *The Book of Enoch, or, I Enoch* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 108.

the complete annihilation of the wicked John seems to be denying that possibility. The only safe way of survival is with Christ.<sup>270</sup>

The “great supper of God” confirms our previous conclusion concerning the symbolic significance of the battle. The gruesome imagery of the dead bodies being eaten by carrion-feeding birds clearly presupposes a battle fought or a judgement. Even Chilton, who defended the notion that Rev. 19:11-16 does not describe the second coming but envisions “Christ’s defeat of the nations by his bare words”,<sup>271</sup> concludes that those who refuse to submit to Christ will be utterly destroyed.<sup>272</sup> Several commentators who understood Christ’s sword from his mouth as providing testimony, or the blood on his robe as being his own,<sup>273</sup> end up admitting that Rev. 19:17-18 describes judged, defeated or destroyed enemies, not converted nations.<sup>274</sup> It is highly unlikely that Rev. 19:11-16 portrays a call to salvation or mere verbal accusations and its aftermath in Rev. 19:17-18 describes judged, destroyed sinners.

Another conclusion drawn from the aftermath of the battle is that it describes the effects of the battle in universal terms. The dead are not only kings and soldiers in service of the beast and the false prophet. They are also free and slaves, small and great. A normal battle would leave some survivors who could flee the victors’ clutches. But since the warrior is divine his victory is perfect, and his enemies are completely obliterated (Rev. 19:21). Unlike Ezek. 39, the passage John borrows to construct his own version of the end, God’s people are not mentioned at all. They do not bury the dead; in fact, the latter are totally absent from this image. This leaves only scavenging birds to clear the battlefield of the corpses.

### 3.3 The battle

The image of the kings of the earth gathered for war in Rev. 19:19 validates the conclusion of the previous chapter that the vision of Rev. 19:17-18 is chronologically displaced by John. Temporally, v. 19 follows the descent of the Divine Warrior, seen here as the response of the

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<sup>270</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 91.

<sup>271</sup> Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 193.

<sup>272</sup> Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 194. I find Chilton’s position incoherent. While he claims that the image of the Divine Warrior is one of conversion, (see p. 193) he also claims that the image of the dead armies clearly shows that the nations who refuse to submit to Christ, as Psalm 2 commands, will be “utterly destroyed” (see p. 194). Then once again he claims that Christ’s mouth-sword “destroys his enemies by converting them” (see p. 195). The only way to reconcile these two opposed understandings is to suppose that the military weapons of the warrior serve both as a means of evangelism and a means of punishment of those who reject his message.

<sup>273</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 238; Boring, *Revelation*, 196. Koester, *Revelation*, 765-66.

<sup>274</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 240; Boring, *Revelation*, 200; Koester, *Revelation*, 768.

beast to the rider and his armies. That gathering had been described earlier in Rev. 16:14 where the dragon, the beast and the false prophet had assembled their armies in defiance of God.<sup>275</sup> Once again, no attack is launched, and the battle is never described. The build-up to the battle and the subsequent lack of details of the actual conflict is a “literary and dramatic device” commonly used in such “esoteric literature.”<sup>276</sup> Boring explains that in John’s theology there could be no such battle.<sup>277</sup> When Christ comes, no resistance is possible.<sup>278</sup> The beast and the false prophet are seized (ἐπιδύσθῃ) Rev. 19:20. The word means to press, weigh down, or lay hold of.<sup>279</sup> It indicates not only the capture of the beast and the false prophet but also the use of force in the process.

Next, John lays out the charges against these two villains.<sup>280</sup> Most of the emphasis is on the activity of the false prophet, described as making signs, and as deceiving those who have taken the mark of the beast and worship his image. These accusations direct the reader back to Rev. 13, which outlines the activity of both of these enemies of God.<sup>281</sup>

The punishment of the beast and the false prophet is to be thrown “alive” (ζῶντες) into the lake of fire. According to Osborne and Beale, the connotation of this passage is that of conscious punishment in the lake. Osborne claims that this is a problem for those “holding to an annihilation view of final judgement.”<sup>282</sup> The passage is a probable allusion to Num. 16:33 and Ps. 55:15 (Ps. 54:16 LXX).<sup>283</sup> In Num. 16:33, Korah, Dathan and Abiram along with 250 prominent Israelites rebelled against Moses and Aaron, alleging that they had equal rights and access to the high-priesthood (Num. 16:3).<sup>284</sup> Moses told these people to take up censers to offer incense to God, along with him and Aaron (Num. 16:16-17). The test would be that if these 250 men as well as Korah, Dathan and Abiram would die a natural death and experience nothing unusual then they would be right and Moses had not been sent by God (Num. 16:29).

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<sup>275</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 760. Notably, however, the name Armageddon is not mentioned. See Jonathan Knight, *Revelation, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 129.

<sup>276</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, 60.

<sup>277</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 199-200.

<sup>278</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 220.

<sup>279</sup> LSJ, s.v. “πιδύσθω.”

<sup>280</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 689.

<sup>281</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 241.

<sup>282</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 690. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 969.

<sup>283</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 761.

<sup>284</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 723.

Alternatively, Moses added that if God was to “create a creation” (וַאֲסִי־בְרִיאָה יִבְרָא), that is, create an extraordinary miracle,<sup>285</sup> and the earth opens and swallows them and their property and these people go alive to the grave (ζῶντες εἰς ᾗδου, Num. 16:30), then all would know that they have treated the Lord with contempt. Indeed, as Moses finished his words the earth opened and swallowed them alive, their households and their possessions. The other 250 prominent Israelites who were offering incense were consumed by fire sent by the Lord (Num. 16:35).<sup>286</sup>

What is interesting in this story is the notion that these people went down to the grave *alive*. This phrase connects this story to Rev. 19:20 and this statement also leads some scholars to suggest conscious torment in the lake of fire. The significance of this statement should be investigated against the backdrop of the source story in Numbers. First, there is no suggestion of prolonged torment in Num. 16. The description of the events seems to suggest that the earth opened, and the rebels fell in and were killed in the event. The account implies a violent, possibly painful but probably quick death. The story emphasizes the supernatural and sudden cause of their death. It met the criteria Moses set earlier for an extraordinary miracle from God precisely because the event was both supernatural and sudden.<sup>287</sup>

The idea of going down to Hades alive is also found in Ps. 55:16. Both Delitzsch and Perowne understand this verse to be a possible allusion to the fate of Korah in Num. 16:30.<sup>288</sup> In this context too, there is no indication that the Psalmist expected the torment of his enemies. In fact, it seems that he hoped they would die swiftly. The NRSV renders the passage as follows:

Let death come upon them;  
let them go down alive to Sheol;  
for evil is in their homes and in their hearts. (Ps. 55:15).

The parallelism<sup>289</sup> of the first two lines suggests that the Psalmist’s hope for his enemies, expressed in the notion of going down alive to Sheol, was a sudden death miraculously facilitated by God. The conclusion is that neither HB backgrounds underlying the image of the beast and the false prophet being thrown *alive* in the lake of fire refer to torment. In both cases,

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<sup>285</sup> Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 1:725.

<sup>286</sup> Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 1:726.

<sup>287</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, 1:725.

<sup>288</sup> J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1989), 440; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 384.

<sup>289</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, 5:384.

the idea of going down to Hades or Sheol alive implies a sudden death facilitated by divine intervention.

The conclusions drawn from the previous use of the phrase “to be thrown alive” into Sheol seem to be appropriate in the context of Rev. 19:20 as well. Because of the intervention of the Divine Warrior, the beast and the false prophet meet their untimely demise in the lake of fire. Like Korah and his company, God brings their end abruptly and unexpectedly. Their being said to have been thrown “alive” in the lake of fire does not resolve the question of whether they were tormented there or not.

The lake of fire here is not the fate of the defeated nations. It will become the fate of all unbelievers, those whose names are not in the book of life, at the final judgement in Rev. 20:11-15. This image of John will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 8. Suffice it to say here that once the beast and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire their fate is sealed. They will never appear actively again in the Revelation narrative. Their names come up only once more in order for John to explicitly tell his readers that the devil will end up in the same lake into which his accomplices had already been cast.

Just before John moves to the next vision, he describes the fate of the wicked who attacked the Divine Warrior. They were killed by the sword that proceeded from his mouth. This is a repetition of Rev. 19:15. Beale proposes two ways to understand the sword. First, as an instrument of the physical death of the ungodly armies at the battle.<sup>290</sup> As a second view, and most probable in his opinion, he proposes that the sword is “the accusatory word of God.”<sup>291</sup> This second view compels Beale to interpret the death by the sword as standing for “a decree of condemnation for which the armies subsequently will receive eternal punishment.”<sup>292</sup> This view is more plausible than Chilton’s who understands the sword as “converting” God’s enemies.<sup>293</sup> However, the image of the earth full of corpses presses the question of the significance of all these casualties. In addition, Beale recognizes that the image is one of complete devastation,<sup>294</sup> which means that “the accusatory word of God” is not simply about words of indictment and denunciation but leaves behind it corpses and desolation. Osborne fittingly observes that “the military imagery in this verse goes beyond the sentence of death to

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<sup>290</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>291</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>292</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>293</sup> Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 195.

<sup>294</sup> Beale, *John’s Use*, 368-69.

the execution of that sentence...[t]his is clearly the sword of destruction and every member of the evil army is killed.”<sup>295</sup>

Lastly, John revisits the image of the carrion-feeding birds feasting on the dead corpses. Earlier, the birds were mentioned in Rev. 19:17 where the angel that stood in the sun invited the birds to the great supper of God, described in Rev. 19:21. The two references to the carrion-eating birds form an *inclusio* or, in Thompson’s terminology a circularity. Circularity “refers to concentric development of a passage so that the ending reflects the beginning”.<sup>296</sup> John’s use of this rhetorical device probably draws the attention of the reader once again to the earth as an endless corpse-strewn battlefield. He spares no effort to intensify an already horrific image when he concludes that the carrion-feeding birds were satiated (ἐχορτάσθησαν) from eating the flesh of the dead. The image is that of a gluttonous feast.<sup>297</sup> The abundance of dead bodies once again points to devastation of universal proportions such that even scavenging birds will have their fill.

Nevertheless, the point should be made about the disparate fortunes the armies and their kings face with the fate of the beast and the false prophet. Even though the image of the lake of fire has not yet been inquired into, an observation was drawn from the fate of the beast and the false prophet. Once these two anti-heroes of Revelation are thrown into the lake, their fate is sealed and they do not reappear John’s narrative. In Rev. 19:21, the nations are destroyed but they are not thrown into the lake of fire. If the lake refers to complete destruction after which there is no possibility of repentance or resurrection, then the death of Rev. 19:21 allows for the return of the nations in the narrative of Revelation. Indeed, it will be shown in subsequent chapters that the nations have a further role to play in John’s story (see Rev. 20:8). The question then that remains is whether the nations’ role involves a chance to repent.

### 3.4 Synthesis

The study of Rev. 19:11-21 allows us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The Divine Warrior who rides the white horse is an image of the Parousia of Christ. It is also an image of judgement against the sinners who are portrayed as the armies of the beast and the false prophet and those who have taken the beast’s mark.

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<sup>295</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 691.

<sup>296</sup> Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 45. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 27-28.

<sup>297</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 691.

2. The image is not one of limited destruction but rather one of worldwide proportions. In fact, there is no evidence from the text that any unbelievers survive the battle. The earth is portrayed as a vast battlefield the day after a battle where the carrion-eating birds indulge in the flesh of the dead corpses.
3. The punishment of the beast and the false prophet in the lake of fire seems to be final and irrevocable. However, the armies of the nations are not thrown into it. This leaves open the possibility of the return of those armies in the plot of Revelation, but is there a chance for repentance after the negative judgement of Rev. 19:21? Answers to these questions will be given in subsequent chapters.



## 4. The eschatological fate of believers in Revelation

Rev. 19:11-21 described Christ's war with the assembled forces of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. It was argued in the previous chapter that the imagery of war is in fact an image of the judgement of the living wicked at the second coming. The outcome of this war is the earth strewn with corpses, an analysis from which the saints were conspicuously absent. This chapter will attempt to determine what happens to the saints according to Revelation during the second coming. The emphasis will be on two issues with further implications for the study of the nations. The first is the locale of the saints. Are they simply delivered from the wicked and then remain on earth or are they taken to heaven? The second question is directly related to John's writing style. Does John follow a particular literary technique in presenting the fate of the saints in relation to that of the nations? If yes, does that technique reveal a particular rhetorical strategy?

It will be argued in this chapter that Rev. 19 portrays the second coming using two contrasting images. The first image in Rev. 19:1-9 is that of the glorious marriage supper of the Lamb. This image describes the fate of the saints at the second coming. The marriage suggests rejoicing and festivities along with the relocation of the bride, an image of the saints, to the groom's home as was the custom of that time. This conclusion suggests that the saints move to heaven at the second coming. The second image in Rev. 19:11-21 is the Divine Warrior defeating his enemies. This image, as noted in the previous chapter, refers to the gloomy fate awaiting the nations and their leaders, who represent the wicked at the second coming.

Next it will also be shown that John's account of the second coming in Rev. 14:14-20 uses the same method, juxtaposing the disparate fates of the saints and the wicked. References to the nations are absent from the harvest images in Rev. 14:14-20. However, study of this passage is warranted since the nations are mentioned in Rev. 14:6 as the recipients of God's warning messages prior to the harvest. Second, and perhaps more importantly, because this passage too demonstrates that John employed the same strategy he uses in Rev. 19. Based on both Rev. 19 and Rev. 14:14-19, we will be able to demonstrate that John followed a specific pattern juxtaposing the fate of the saints with that of the wicked, consistently giving priority to the saints by dealing with them first. This does not suggest chronological priority of the events, which probably take place simultaneously, but a theological one.

## 4.1 The saints in Rev. 19:1-9

Rev. 19 begins by firmly establishing the location of the vision. The events take place “in heaven” (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, Rev. 19:1). This shifts the locale from the previous chapter, where the earth was the focus and the vision dealt with the fall of Babylon. The phrase “in heaven” also suggests a shift in the authorial viewpoint. In Rev. 18, John appears to report the events from the earth.<sup>298</sup> He describes the direction and voices he hears as coming from heaven (Rev. 18:1: καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, Rev. 18:4: Καὶ ἤκουσα ἄλλην φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). The voice of the great multitude in Rev. 19:1 does not come from heaven (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) but is heard in heaven (ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, Rev. 19:1) where presumably all the participants of the narrative are located.

There is unclarity as to the identity of the large crowd (ὄχλου πολλοῦ) in Rev. 19:1. Aune, on the basis of Rev. 5:11, understands the crowd to be heavenly beings.<sup>299</sup> Wall points out that the content of the hymn reflects the angelic praise in Rev. 12:10a and concludes that the crowd is angelic.<sup>300</sup> With regard to Aune’s argument, Rev. 5:11 speaks of myriads and thousands of angels singing but never calls those worshippers ὄχλος. The expression ὄχλος πολὺς occurs three times, in Rev. 7:9, 19:1; 6. In Rev. 7:9, it refers to human believers from every nation, tribe, people and tongue.<sup>301</sup> Likewise, the crowd of Rev. 19:6 refers to humans since the call from the throne in Rev. 19:5 is directed to God’s servants and God-fearers, great and small. Even in Rev. 17:15, where the word ὄχλος appears without the qualifying adjective πολὺς, it refers to people and not to angelic beings. Thus, John consistently uses the word ὄχλος to refer to people.<sup>302</sup>

In addition, the chorus of Rev. 19:1-2 appears to be a response to the call of Rev. 18:20.<sup>303</sup> The call is directed to heaven, the saints, the apostles and the prophets. It is reasonable to assume then that the crowd which responds includes these groups. Mounce also points out that the hymn refers specifically to salvation (as in Rev. 7:10) and addresses concerns over avenging the blood of the martyrs (as in Rev. 6:10). The subject matter of the hymn therefore

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<sup>298</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 233.

<sup>299</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1024. See also Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 244.

<sup>300</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 220.

<sup>301</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 147; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 60.

<sup>302</sup> Bauckham points out that John regularly uses the terms λαός and ὄχλος for the people of God. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 331.

<sup>303</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 336; Koester, *Revelation*, 726.

makes it more likely that it is sung by the triumphant church.<sup>304</sup> To sum up, Rev. 19:1 moves the perspective to heaven, from where John hears praise that resembles the voices of a large crowd. The designation “large crowd”, the subject matter of the praises, as well as the fact that the praises are a response to a call from Rev. 18:20 for the saints to rejoice, all point to the fact that this crowd is made up of believers. This does not mean that angels or other heavenly beings do not participate in this choir. They do,<sup>305</sup> in fact, the twenty-four elders and the four animals are specifically mentioned as participating in the praise.<sup>306</sup>

Some commentators claim that there is a possible change in the venue from heaven back to earth in Rev. 19:5.<sup>307</sup> The reasoning is that Rev. 19 describes three separate groups of praise: the heavenly multitude, comprising the souls of dead believers in heaven and possibly angels (Rev. 19:1-3), the elders and the four animals (Rev. 19:4-5), and finally the believers on earth (Rev. 19:6-8).<sup>308</sup> However, there is no indication whatsoever that John changes venues or that the adulation directed to God is offered from earth. When venues change in the praise sessions of Rev. 5:13, John specifically mentions heaven, earth, under the earth, and the sea as participating in God’s praise. Rev. 19:5 does not suggest any change in the locale. The adulation still takes place in heaven, but it is simply a different choir that responds,<sup>309</sup> in Rev. 19:5 it is “the servants of God [and] those who fear him” (οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ [καὶ] οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν).

In conclusion, the first two hallelujahs (in Rev. 19:1, 3) are voiced by the crowd in heaven. The third hallelujah is the response of the elders and the four creatures (Rev. 19:4) and the fourth hallelujah is once again voiced by a human crowd (Rev. 19:6) as a response to the call for praise from the throne (Rev. 19:5). No alternation of locales is mentioned, only that of choirs. The saints praising God in heaven suggests that the church has been relocated there. The saints around God’s throne and in the presence of the Lamb have already been indicated in Rev. 7:9 where John saw a large crowd of believers from all nations.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>304</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 336-37; Osborne, *Revelation*, 663.

<sup>305</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 926; Koester, *Revelation*, 726.

<sup>306</sup> There is little question about the otherworldly nature of the four creatures. The twenty-four elders are more difficult to identify. That their song sets them apart from the redeemed makes it probably best to understand them as an angelic priestly order, Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 135, or as members of the heavenly council, Roloff, *Revelation*, 69-70.

<sup>307</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 666; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 266.

<sup>308</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 666.

<sup>309</sup> That is a different choir from that of Rev. 19:4.

<sup>310</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 100; Reddish, *Revelation*, 147-48.

Another indication that the church is in heaven in Rev. 19 is in the imagery of the wedding banquet of the Lamb. The image of a banquet as a metaphor of participation in eschatological salvation is a common image throughout the Bible (Isa. 25:6; Matt. 8:11-12; Luke 13:28-29; 14:15). An additional image commonly found in the prophetic books is the image of marriage between God and Israel, who is compared to a woman (Hosea 2:19; Isa. 54:6; Ezek. 16:7).<sup>311</sup> Early Christian writers combined these two images together, assigning the role of the groom who will be reunited with the church as his bride to the coming Christ (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23, 33).<sup>312</sup> John adopts these traditions, juxtaposing them with the illicit relationships the harlot Babylon offers to the world. The fate of Babylon is also contrasted with the fate of believers. Babylon meets her destruction and is condemned to never hear again the “voice of bride groom and bride” (Rev. 18:23).<sup>313</sup> This fate stands in contrast to the joyful praises of Rev. 19:1-7 on the occasion of the wedding banquet of the Lamb and his bride. The bridal garment of the Lamb’s wife, an important accessory of every bride (see Jer. 2:32), is also contrasted with the clothes of Babylon in Rev. 17:3-4. Last, the banquet of the followers of the Lamb is contrasted to the banquet of the carrion-feeding birds in Rev. 19:17-18.

An important aspect of ancient Jewish weddings was the during the wedding night procession. The bridegroom set out from his home in order to receive his wife who dwelt still in her father’s residence.<sup>314</sup> The parable of the ten virgins as told by Jesus deals with this procession.<sup>315</sup> The sequel to the procession was the wedding feast celebrated in the bridegroom’s house, which was the high point of the celebration.<sup>316</sup> Apparently, young ladies lit the dark road to the destination with oil lamps. The procession that led the bride to the bridegroom’s house symbolically described the transfer of “the jurisdiction of the bride from her father to her husband.”<sup>317</sup> The wife was also thus relocated from her father’s house to the house of the bridegroom. The celebratory banquet was held after the procession at the bridegroom’s home (Matt. 25:10).<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 212.

<sup>312</sup> Roloff, 212; Knight, *Revelation*, 125.

<sup>313</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 733.

<sup>314</sup> Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>315</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 228.

<sup>316</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 947.

<sup>317</sup> Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 172.

<sup>318</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 232; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 340.

The image of the wedding banquet of Rev. 19 fits the image of wedding celebrations taking place at the bridegroom's home. In the present case, the Lamb's home location would be heaven, where he is often depicted around God's throne (Rev. 5:6; 8; 13; 7:9, 10; 17). Koester proposes that the image is that of a betrothal, a stage in marriage that took place approximately a year before the wedding. Since the betrothal was a formal agreement tantamount to marriage, the Lamb's bride is called wife (γυνή, Rev. 19:7) before the wedding.<sup>319</sup> The betrothed woman was indeed called wife (γυνή), as in Matt. 1:20. However, there is no evidence that the betrothal was ever called γάμος. In Rev. 19:7 John claims that the wedding (γάμος) of the Lamb has come (ἦλθεν). It is not possible to claim that these celebrations are part of a betrothal ceremony when the context speaks only of a wedding celebration, with emphasis on the wedding garments of the bride (Rev. 19:7-8). Koester's position is odd because he also realizes that according to Revelation the Christian discipleship is analogous to betrothal.<sup>320</sup> This is certainly the image that Paul employs in 2 Cor. 11:2. However, the passage in Rev. 19:1-9 is not about Christian discipleship but about the eschatological reward at the end of the age.<sup>321</sup> The context of Rev. 19 is after the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:2 and the defeat of the kings allied with her by the Lamb in Rev. 17:14. The heavenly hallelujahs and the praise in Rev. 19:1-6 is a specific response to the fall of Babylon and the resumption of the kingdom by the almighty God. Nothing in the text suggests discipleship.<sup>322</sup> Ladd, who does not see a wedding in Rev. 19:7 either, claims that this is only the announcement of the wedding feast, not the event itself.<sup>323</sup> His position would make sense if a feast was described later in the narrative, but it is not. It is more logical then to accept that the banquet has been celebrated at the time of its announcement rather than a thousand years later in the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:2-3. It should also be noted

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<sup>319</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 737.

<sup>320</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 737.

<sup>321</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 212.

<sup>322</sup> Koester suggests that the saints will be presented to Christ at the resurrection as at a wedding, erroneously citing Rev. 4:14 as proof. He probably means Rev. 14:4 where the hundred and forty-four thousand are presented as virgins. Koester claims that the wedding will take place "with resurrection to life in new Jerusalem, where the Lamb and the bride will fully share the same dwelling (Rev. 21:2-3)." Koester, *Revelation*, 737-38. I agree with the need of a resurrection so that all believers will be together at the wedding. However, there is no indication of a resurrection in the passage he quotes. The resurrection of the saints appears to be at the beginning of the millennium in Rev. 20:4. Incidentally, the millennium also begins right after the second coming. (See Rev. 19:11-21 for the second coming and Rev. 20:1-3 for the beginning of the thousand-year period which appear in John's narrative as consecutive events. For more details, see chapters 5 and 6.).

<sup>323</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 248.

that Rev. 21:2-3 portrays the new Jerusalem, the bride, as descending from heaven.<sup>324</sup> For the saints to descend from heaven<sup>325</sup> the logical assumption is that at some point in the narrative they have ascended there, which means that Rev. 21:2-3 supports our claim that the church has previously been taken to heaven. Finally, the contrast between the festivities of Rev. 19:1-9 and the announcement of the lack of wedding celebrations in the desolate Babylon (καὶ φωνὴ νυμφίου καὶ νύμφης οὐ μὴ ἀκουσθῇ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι, Rev. 18:23) also suggests that Rev. 19 deals not with a betrothal but rather with actual wedding celebrations.

To sum up, the eschatological joyful banquet, its explicit designation as a wedding banquet, the bridal preparations and her attire, as well as the contrasts that John makes with Babylon all point to the notion that John describes here not a betrothal ceremony but an actual wedding. The very imagery of the wedding in those days suggested the relocation of the bride from her parental residence to her husband's new home. In Revelation 19, the image of the wedding also suggests that the believers are taken to heaven. This conclusion also confirms the location that John gives for his vision, heaven (Rev. 19:1).

The view that the church is taken to heaven during the second coming is not a new position but one found in the synoptic, Johannine and Pauline traditions.<sup>326</sup> In Christian eschatology there are scenarios in which the believers are gathered by angels (Matt. 24:31, Mark 13:27)<sup>327</sup> or Jesus himself and are taken to heaven (John 14:1-4; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).<sup>328</sup> The

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<sup>324</sup> Based on the description of the new Jerusalem as a bride in Rev. 21:2, Koester concludes that the marriage actually takes place then. Koester, *Revelation*, 737-38. However, it is also possible that John always views the new Jerusalem as the bride of the Lamb. Since she is the eternal bride of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem is portrayed as a bride before the millennium, after the millennium, and forever.

<sup>325</sup> Assuming that the bride is the new Jerusalem and a representation of the saints, an assumption soundly based on Rev. 21:2 (καὶ τὴν πόλιν τὴν ἁγίαν Ἱερουσαλὴμ καὶ νύμφην εἶδον καταβαίνουσάν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἡτοιμασμένην ὡς νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς). This position will be further argued in subsequent chapters.

<sup>326</sup> E.g., Matt. 24:31; John 14:2-3; 1 Thess. 4:17. This position is not the same as the popular theory that suggests the church is raptured secretly before Jesus' coming to avoid the period of tribulation. Matt. 24:30 uses the word φανήσεται which means to appear and adds the sound of great trumpets (μετὰ σάλπιγγος μεγάλης) as the angels gather the elect. Likewise, Paul in 1 Thess. 4:16 speaks of shouted commands (κελεύσματα), the voice of archangels (φωνῇ), and the trumpet call of God (σάλπιγγι θεοῦ). Revelation also makes it clear that the saints go through the great tribulation and emerge victorious around God's throne (Rev. 7:9, 14). Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 139.

<sup>327</sup> Margaret Davies, *Matthew*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 193; R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2007), 466.

<sup>328</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 297; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 249-50; Kim Papaioannou, "The House of God in John 14:2 as a Reference to the Heavenly Temple," in *Earthly Shadows, Heavenly Realities: Temple/Sanctuary Cosmology in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Jewish Literature* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017), 131-33.

concept of an eschatological gathering of Israel is also found in the HB (Ps. 50:3-5; Isa. 49:6; 66:18-20; Jer. 32:37; Ezek. 34:13; 36:24).<sup>329</sup> However, in contrast to the New Testament, all the HB passages describe the believers as gathered back into their land, not in heaven. The only reference to a possible kingdom of heaven occurs in the T. Moses 10:9.<sup>330</sup> Even there it is not clear whether the passage is to be interpreted literally, referring to a heavenly kingdom, or metaphorically describing the exaltation of Israel.<sup>331</sup> At present perhaps we may safely conclude that John's expectations for the future included a gathering of the saints in heaven. This idea was not invented by John but was part of his Christian heritage. Our upcoming analysis of the millennial kingdom of Rev. 20:4-6 will have to confirm its location in heaven. Next, the succeeding image of the second coming, specifically with regard to the saints, will be considered.

#### 4.2 The absence of the saints in Rev. 19:11-21

In contrast to Rev. 19:1-9, the saints appear to be entirely absent from John's description of the Parousia in Rev. 19:11-21. The only possible reference to the saints is found in Rev. 19:14 where "the armies that are in heaven" (τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) accompany the Divine Warrior. Scholars are divided in their opinions of the identity of these armies. Some think that they are the angels that accompany Jesus,<sup>332</sup> others understand this to mean the saints,<sup>333</sup> and yet others assume this means both the angelic hosts and the saints.<sup>334</sup> Most commentators are not dogmatic in their choice and perhaps this is prudent since there are good arguments for all sides.

Support for the notion that the heavenly armies is a reference to angels comes from the HB, Jewish apocalyptic literature, and New Testament descriptions of the second coming of

<sup>329</sup> Culpepper, *Mark*, 466; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 290.

<sup>330</sup> D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 290-91.

<sup>331</sup> J. Priest, "Testament of Moses," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 933.

<sup>332</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 219; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 231; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 255; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 253.

<sup>333</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 960; Reddish, *Revelation*, 368-96; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. 2, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 135-36; Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 386; Sweet, *Revelation*, 283.

<sup>334</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 321-22; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 346; Koester, *Revelation*, 757, 764; Osborne, *Revelation*, 684; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1059-60.

Christ and the greater context of Revelation. In the HB, holy angels often accompanied God and became a regular feature of theophanies (Deut. 33:3), especially when they describe his coming in judgement (Zech. 14:5; Dan. 7:10; Ps. 68:17).<sup>335</sup> Jewish apocalyptic literature also adopted the concept of an army of angels surrounding or escorting God in His visitation to earth, especially as he was bringing judgement (1 En. 1:4, 9, 2 En. 17:1; 3 En. 35:1; T. Levi 3:3).<sup>336</sup> The theme of angelic armies surrounding Jesus at his second coming is also a New Testament motif found in both the synoptic, Pauline traditions and Jude (Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31; Mark 8:38; 13:26-27; Luke 9:26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 4:16; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 7).<sup>337</sup> Last, even Revelation includes the idea of an angelic army in Rev. 12:7.<sup>338</sup> This army is also implied in Rev. 14:18-20. The words ἄχρι τῶν χαλινῶν τῶν ἵππων suggest an attacking angelic army of Christ riding horses just like the army of Rev. 19:14.<sup>339</sup> It is noteworthy that Rev. 14:14-20 describes Jesus seated on the clouds, which is a common motif of the second coming in the New Testament (Matt. 24:30; Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 1:7).<sup>340</sup>

On the other hand, those who view this army as the saints appeal to the immediate context of Revelation. This celestial army is said “to be dressed in linen white [and] clear” (ἐνδεδυμένοι βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν, Rev. 19:14). This apparel is remarkably similar to the apparel the wife of the Lamb was given to wear a few verses before in Rev. 19:8 and her clothes are described as fine linen bright and clear (βύσσινον λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν). Since the wife of the Lamb represents the church and the fine linen (βύσσινον) is specifically said to be the righteous deeds of the saints (Rev. 19:8), it appears that the two passages share a clear and intentional connection.<sup>341</sup> In addition, according to Rev. 17:14 the Lamb as he wages war against the kings is said to prevail because he is the Lord of lords and King of kings and “those who are with him

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<sup>335</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1059. These angels are identified as holy ones (קְדוּשִׁים) in Zech. 14:5 but the word is a reference to the angelic host. Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Exegetical Commentary* (Biblical Studies Press, 2003), 306; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 620.

<sup>336</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 684; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1059.

<sup>337</sup> Aune includes Justin *I Apol.* 51.9 in this list. Justin adds the angels in Dan. 7:13.

<sup>338</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 253.

<sup>339</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:136.

<sup>340</sup> Strictly speaking, Acts 1:9-11 does not describe the second coming but the ascension of Jesus. However, the angels told the disciples that Jesus would return in the same manner they saw him going up to heaven. Acts 1:9 describes a cloud receiving (ὑπέλαβεν) Jesus.

<sup>341</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 960. This is not the only connection the two passages share. Both contain the theme of an eschatological banquet, for the saints in Rev. 19:9 and for the carrion birds in Rev. 19:17.



are called, elect and faithful” (οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί). According to Charles, the adjectives “called”, “elect” and “faithful” cannot be applied to angels.<sup>342</sup>

Those who believe that these armies are a reference to both angels and saints base their choice on passages mentioning both angels and saints fighting together against their enemies. For instance, Ford points to several occasions in the Maccabees where the people prayed to God and asked him to send his angels to support them in their fights (1 Macc. 7:41; 10:29; 2 Macc. 11:6; 15:23; 4 Macc. 4:10).<sup>343</sup> Likewise, the Qumran literature contains the belief that some chosen elect who lived on earth but went to heaven will fight alongside the angels. Once again, the notion is suggested that chosen people and angels join forces in the battle.<sup>344</sup>

Some of the claims of the views above ought to be assessed. We will begin with the last view. The idea that God’s angels will assist believers in their struggle against their enemies and help in their deliverance is certainly a common motif, also attested in the HB (Ps. 34:7; 35:5-6; Isa. 37:36). However, this is hardly the image of Rev. 19. In the HB and the LXX, the context is nearly always the people of God being attacked by enemy nations and then rescued by God and or his angels in battle. The host of Rev. 19:14 is not based on earth and therefore was not attacked by the nations; neither is it said that the celestial army went to rescue anybody. In fact, this army does not even participate in the battle.<sup>345</sup> The heavenly army of Christ is described specifically as being in heaven (τὰ στρατεύματα [τὰ] ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) and simply accompanying him as he commences the attack. There is no discussion of any deliverance in the passage because the saints are otherwise absent from the picture. The sole motif that John seems to deal with is judgement, not assistance and deliverance for the faithful. Rev. 19:14, therefore, does not depict the same image of believers joining forces with the heavenly host to fight the holy war.

The view that the celestial army of Rev. 19:14 represents the saints draws most of its arguments from the immediate context of Revelation. The white clothes are generally thought

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<sup>342</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:135.

<sup>343</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 322.

<sup>344</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 322.

<sup>345</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 219. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 346. Contra Miller, who although he notes that these armies do not participate in the war, claims that they are the saints who fight a continuous battle, “even though it [the battle] has not yet reached its ultimate stage”. Kevin E. Miller, “The Nuptial Eschatology of Revelation 19-22,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1998): 315-16. Rev. 19:11-21 does not describe the believers emerging victorious from their personal battles of faith (as in Rev. 2:27; 3:5). The emphasis is not on the war, as is evident from the fact that the war is not even described. The emphasis is on the eschatological judgement of God against the wicked.

of as an image of the vindicated saints (see Rev. 6:11). However, Apocalyptic books often portray angels serving as priests in the heavenly temple and wearing white linen clothes.<sup>346</sup> In fact, Rev. 15:6 explicitly describes the seven angels that carry God’s plagues as dressed in “linen, clear and bright” (λίνον καθαρὸν λαμπρὸν). This phrase also reflects Rev. 19:14, which speaks of “fine linen white and clear” (βύσσινον λευκὸν καθαρὸν). Thus Rev. 19:14 echoes both the clothes of the saints in Rev. 19:8 and the clothes of the angels in Rev. 15:6. Therefore, the clothing alone is not sufficient evidence to imply that the heavenly army is a reference to saints.

The other argument in support of the theory that the army of Rev. 19:14 are the saints comes from Rev. 17:14 where it is said that those who are with the Lamb are “called, chosen and faithful” (οἱ μετ’ αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί). Charles claims that this designation cannot apply to angels.<sup>347</sup> However, Charles does not demonstrate why is this so. Revelation does not use the adjectives κλητοὶ and ἐκλεκτοὶ elsewhere. In the LXX, the adjective κλητός is used primarily in connection with days *called* holy (e.g., Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:2, 3, 4, 7, Num. 28:25). In some other cases, it refers to invitees *called* to form a party (Judg. 14:11; 1 Kgs. 1:41, 49). The most relevant reference that fits the context of Revelation is Zeph. 1:7, which speaks of the earth’s impending judgement and especially that of Judah and Jerusalem. The text describes the judgement as a sacrifice, a notion taken from Isa 34:6 and the oracles of Gog in Ezek. 39:17. The passage, therefore, not only shares the theme of judgement with Rev. 17:14, but is also directly related to passages John has used to describe that judgement.<sup>348</sup> The *called* in Zeph. 1:7 have been consecrated by God and they are those who will do the slaying. In accordance with other HB passages, the instruments of God’s punishment are other nations.<sup>349</sup> The word *called* in this context is a reference to the army’s divine summons to do God’s bidding. This could easily be the job description of angels as well.

The adjective (ἐκλεκτοὶ) is often found in the LXX in connection with soldiers who are supposed to be skilled in battle (Judg. 20:15, 34; 1 Sam. 24:3 LXX ref. 26:2). Although in the NT it frequently refers to believers, in 1 Tim. 5:21 it means God’s angels specifically.<sup>350</sup> Finally,

<sup>346</sup> For the priestly clothes, see Sanders, *Judaism*, 92-102. For angels serving as priests in the heavenly temple, see Ioannis Giantzaklidis, “The Heavenly Temple in Noncanonical Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Earthly Shadows, Heavenly Realities: Temple/Sanctuary Cosmology in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Jewish Literature* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017), 271, 275-76, 281, 287, 289.

<sup>347</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:135.

<sup>348</sup> See the previous chapter.

<sup>349</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, 10:441.

<sup>350</sup> Likewise, the ἐκλεκτοὶ is probably a reference to angels in Tob. 8:15:...εὐλογεῖτωσάν σε οἱ ἅγιοι σου καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ κτίσεις σου καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι σου καὶ οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ σου εὐλογεῖτωσάν σε εἰς πάντας τοὺς αἰῶνας.

the adjective faithful (πιστοί) may be an allusion to Rev. 12:7 in which it is evident that not all of God's angels remained faithful to him since some sided with Satan and were eventually expelled from heaven.<sup>351</sup> The point is not that the designation κλητοί καὶ ἐκλεκτοί καὶ πιστοί cannot apply to saints but rather that all adjectives can also apply to God's angelic army. This army consists of selected skillful heavenly warriors (ἐκλεκτοί), it is called and consecrated for the task (κλητοί), and all its soldiers have remained faithful (πιστοί) to God in his previous battle against the dragon. Therefore, there is no good reason to abandon the first option that the host is angelic. That option fits best the context of Rev. 19 and it has support from multiple backgrounds.

These conclusions suggest that the second coming in Rev. 19 is portrayed in two distinct images. The first describes the fate of believers as an eschatological wedding banquet with praises and doxologies in heaven. The second image is that of Christ as the Divine Warrior who eliminates his enemies and leaves the earth full of corpses. This second image portrays the judgement of the nations which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is a reference to the judgement of the wicked.

### 4.3 The grain harvest as an image of salvation

Rev. 19 is not the first time that John juxtaposes the fates of the saints and the wicked during his description of the second coming. In Rev. 14:14-20 John describes the fate of the saints and that of the wicked with the image of two harvests. The passage uses several themes of the second coming also attested in other early Christian texts. First, Christ<sup>352</sup> is called "son of Man" and is portrayed as riding the clouds (cf. Matt. 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Acts 1:9-11, 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7). The clouds are probably not only a vehicle for Christ's

<sup>351</sup> On the primordial nature of the battle in Rev. 12, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 470-73. On the unfaithfulness and punishment of angels in 2 Peter and Jude, see Kim Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 157-61. Rev. 12:4 also alludes to the dragon dragging a third of the stars to earth, implying their deception and unfaithfulness to God.

<sup>352</sup> There is some discussion on the identity of the cloud rider. On the basis that the figure is described "like" a son of man, and the angel of Rev. 14:15 is called "other angel", Kiddle and Aune assume that this is an angel other than Jesus. Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 285. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 841. However, the phrase ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου may be an allusion to Dan. 7:13 (ὡς υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου). Osborne, *Revelation*, 550. Likewise, the phrase "other angel" has been used earlier in Rev. 14:6, 8-9, and continues in 14:17-18. Osborne considers this as a literal ploy that binds together Rev. 14:6-20. Osborne, 550. Since elsewhere in Revelation Jesus rides the clouds (Rev. 1:7) and looks "like a son of man" (Rev. 1:13) it is safe to identify the figure of Rev. 14:14 as Jesus. See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 279; Koester, *Revelation*, 623; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 199.

descent but also a sign of God's glory or divine presence.<sup>353</sup> Second, the eschatological judgement is portrayed as a harvest (Matt. 13:24-30; 37-43).<sup>354</sup> Third, the golden crown (στέφανος) upon the head of the son of man (Rev. 14:14) is a symbol of victory. This imagery is also used in Rev. 2:10 to denote faithfulness even to the point of death. There Christ assures the faithful that they too will receive golden crowns upon their victory.<sup>355</sup> In other early Christian texts, the golden crown not worn by Christ signifies the reward and victory of the believers (1 Cor. 9:25; 2 Tim. 4:8; Jas. 1:12).

Several commentators point out that Rev. 14:14-20 contains two images of judgement.<sup>356</sup> The tool that is used in both harvests is a sickle (δρέπανος). Sickles were thought of primarily as symbols of peace (Isa. 2:4). In some cases, however, the symbol of the sickle had threatening connotations (Zech. 5:1-4 LXX).<sup>357</sup> The first judgement narrated in Rev. 14:14-16 refers to a grain harvest. Although the text does not specify the type of crop, the idea that the harvest has dried (ἐξηράνθη) suggests grains like wheat. The imagery of harvesting the grain often depicts gathering the believers into God's kingdom (Matt. 13:30; Luke 10:2; John 4:35-38). Rev. 14:14-16 portrays the harvest free from any negative depictions of that judgement. Such negative pictures could include threshing, performed by animals trampling the grain, or winnowing, the process by which the chaff was separated from the grain and then burned.<sup>358</sup> Examples of such negative aspects of harvest exist in the Bible (Isa. 21:10; 28:28; 41:16; Jer. 51:33; Matt. 3:12; Luke 3:17), but John omits them and concentrates on harvesting the grain, which is always presented as a positive outcome of the judgement. The process is structured in three stages: the command to harvest given by an angel from the temple (Rev. 14:15b), the reason for the harvest (Rev. 14:15c), and the execution of the harvest (Rev. 14:16). The conclusion of the parable of the tares in Matt. 13:30 (...gather the wheat into my storehouse /...τὸν δὲ σῖτον συναγάγετε εἰς τὴν ἀποθήκην μου) seems to summarize the ending of this judgement appropriately.

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<sup>353</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 67; Koester, *Revelation*, 622.

<sup>354</sup> Davies, *Matthew*, 112-13. Farrer calls the connexion of the prophecy in Rev. 14:14-20 with the parable in Matt. 13:37-42 "unmistakable." Farrer, *The Revelation*, 166.

<sup>355</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 623.

<sup>356</sup> E.g. Osborne, *Revelation*, 553; Koester, *Revelation*, 629-30; Sigve Tonstad, *Revelation*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 211.

<sup>357</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 624. According to Koester, the sickle in Rev. 14:14-16 functions as a positive symbol, whereas in Rev. 14:17-20 it is a negative one.

<sup>358</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology*, 96.

Bauckham also points out that the 144,000 in Rev. 14:4 are called the first fruits for God (ἀπαρχὴ τῶ θεῷ). The first fruits were harvested before the rest of the crop was reaped and was presented to God as an offering.<sup>359</sup> Bauckham proposes that the martyrs that were redeemed from the nations are “the first fruits of the harvest of all the nations, whose reaping is depicted later in 14:14-16.”<sup>360</sup> Here Bauckham assumes that the 144,000 are a different crowd from the believers of all the nations and function as a harbinger of the latter harvest that would follow in Rev. 14:14-16. Earlier, Bauckham argued that in Rev. 7:4 the innumerable crowd are the same as the numbered army of 144,000.<sup>361</sup> This would constitute the innumerable crowd of Rev. 7:9 martyrs as well. However, according to Rev. 7:9 the large crowd comprises people from all nations who are identified as those who have come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). Tribulation is the fate of all who want to live godly lives (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12) and “redemption by Christ’s blood benefits all Christians, not only martyrs (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).”<sup>362</sup> Nothing in this description suggests martyrdom<sup>363</sup> and the large crowd is nowhere specifically identified as composed of martyrs.<sup>364</sup> This means that John probably identifies the 144,000 with the believers in general. Consequently, when in Rev. 14:4 the 144,000 are described as first fruit dedicated to God, they are not described in contrast to a supposed later harvest of believers in Rev. 14:14, but are identical to the believers of that harvest.<sup>365</sup> Their harvest is the first one preceding that of the unbelievers that will be followed in Rev. 14:17-20. Once again, John employs the *hysteron proteron* device to portray the result (the gathered saints Rev. 14:1) prior to the process that brings about this result (the harvest,

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<sup>359</sup> Richard Rigsby, “First Fruits,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 2:796-797.

<sup>360</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology*, 96.

<sup>361</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 215-16.

<sup>362</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 430.

<sup>363</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 318; Koester, *Revelation*, 430. Contra Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 1:210. Charles assumes that they are martyrs because they wear white robes and the “faithful who died a peaceful death were not to receive these robes till after the final judgment.” This argument assumes that the image John describes is before the final judgment.

<sup>364</sup> This is why many commentators simply identify this crowd with the redeemed believers and not simply with the martyrs. Reddish, *Revelation*, 147; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 171; Koester, *Revelation*, 427; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 433.

<sup>365</sup> Koester also sees a connection between the two passages. He claims that “The first vision refers to the followers of the Lamb as the ‘first fruit’ of those who are redeemed from the earth (14:4), and this theme continues when the harvest imagery is used for salvation later in the chapter (14:14-16).” Koester, *Revelation*, 615. Earlier Koester argued that the 144,000 can “best be understood as the whole Christian community.” Koester, 607. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 733; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 648; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 267-68.

Rev. 14:14-16). In the process, John is inverting the expected order of the events of the narrative.<sup>366</sup>

Furthermore, the image of the first fruit does not quite fit Bauckham's suggestion of a harvest before the next two harvests of Rev. 14:14-20. The first fruit was dedicated to God and was given as food for priests (Num. 18:12-14). The law concerning the first fruit did not apply simply to the harvest of produce but also to the birth of animals that were to be redeemed at a later stage.<sup>367</sup> The law did not suggest that the first fruit was a deposit for a subsequent harvest for God or the priests. Future crops that were harvested or animals born later belonged to their owners. The reference to the first fruit therefore does not require a hypothetical second harvest for God. The image of the 144,000 as the first fruit distinguishes them "from the rest of humankind, not from the rest of the church."<sup>368</sup> Jas. 1:18 also refers to the Christians (those who were born of God, "ἀπεκύησεν ἡμᾶς") as the first fruit.<sup>369</sup> James's usage of the phrase "first fruit" reflects Jeremiah's: "Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says the LORD." (Jer. 2:3 NRSV). The phrase "first fruit" in both of these passages does not presuppose a latter future harvest but rather asserts that the first fruit (whether they are Israel or the Christians) belong to God.<sup>370</sup>

Hence, it seems that the first harvest of Rev. 14:14-16 is the first fruit. The believers are the first fruit for God, and the rest of humanity is destined to destruction. Rev. 14:16 does not explain where the harvest is collected. However, immediately after the twofold description of the harvest in Rev. 14:14-20 John portrays those who were victorious against the beast as standing by the sea of glass singing the song of Moses (Rev. 15:2-3). The sea of glass in Revelation is located before God's throne (Rev. 4:6).<sup>371</sup> The image recalls Israel's crossing of the Red Sea and their subsequent song of victory. Boring observes that as "Israel once stood on the banks of the Red Sea and celebrated God's liberating acts of the exodus, the church will stand on the shore of the heavenly sea and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb."<sup>372</sup> Once again

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<sup>366</sup> On the *hysteron proteron*, see Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 243; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 258-59; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 246.

<sup>367</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 151.

<sup>368</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 607.

<sup>369</sup> James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, Repr., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 166.

<sup>370</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 742-44.

<sup>371</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 204; Boring, *Revelation*, 172-73.

<sup>372</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 173; Koester, *Revelation*, 633-34.

John's language suggests that the church will be transferred into heaven right after the second coming.<sup>373</sup>

To recap our findings, the image of the first harvest draws upon positive scriptural images of gathering grains but at the same time omits actions that have been associated in past passages with negative judgement. The 144,000 at the beginning of the chapter represented as first fruit are probably another positive image of the totality of the saints presented as an offering to God. In the aftermath of the judgement, the saints are portrayed as a victorious spiritual Israel in heaven before God's throne and the sea of glass. But John includes a second harvest, one that apparently was not gathered for God. It will be shown that in Revelation 14 the second harvest is an image of the destruction of the wicked.

#### 4.4 The grape harvest as an image of judgement

The second harvest, that of the grapes, is portrayed in parallel but contrasting terms to the grain harvest. The process of the grape judgement is also described in a similar three stage process. The command to pick the grapes is uttered by an angel who comes from the altar of the temple (Rev. 14:18a; cf. Rev 14:15a), The reason being that the grapes have ripened (Rev. 14:18c; cf. Rev. 14:15c). The harvest image is concluded by the harvesting of the grapes and their being trampled into wine (Rev. 14:19-20).<sup>374</sup>

The two harvesting images, however, have significant differences. The grain harvest is performed by "one like the son of man" who is seated on clouds (Rev. 14:14) whereas the second harvest is performed by an angel who comes from the temple (Rev. 14:17) and therefore is not Christ.<sup>375</sup> Yet another angel appears this time from the altar. This latest angel according to Rev. 14:18 is in charge of the fire. Fire is frequently associated with judgement, which is

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<sup>373</sup> Likewise, the proleptic image of the 144,000 on mount Zion in Rev. 14:1 is also a heavenly location. Just like the location of the shores of the red sea in Rev. 15:2 was a place associated with divine deliverance so is mount Zion. In the early Christian tradition mount Zion was located in heaven (see Heb. 12:22). On the heavenly location of mount Zion in Rev. 14:1, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 732; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 267; Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 263; Koester, *Revelation*, 616.

<sup>374</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 774. Beale words the structure differently: (1) an angel from the temple, (2) commands in a great voice, (3) because the harvest is ripe. He does not include in this structure the execution of the order.

<sup>375</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 553. Swete aptly observes: "There is delicate beauty in the assignment of the ingathering of the vintage to an angel, while the Son of Man Himself reaps the wheat-harvest. The work of death is fitly left in the hands of a minister of justice; the Saviour of men appears 'εἰς σωτηρίαν' Heb. 9:28" Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 190. Likewise Philo claims in *Conf.* 182 that God "has appointed the punishments to be inflicted by other beings; for it was expedient that he himself should be looked upon as the cause of well-doing...". Trans. by Yonge.

why the description of this angel suggests he is in charge of punishing God's enemies.<sup>376</sup> The harvested grapes are then placed in the winepress of God's wrath (εἰς τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μέγαν, Rev. 14:19). Notably, God's wrath was not mentioned in the grain harvest. The winepress of God's wrath is mentioned again in Rev. 19:15, which depicts the judgement of the wicked. Last, the consequence of pressing the grapes is not grape juice but blood, (ἐξῆλθεν αἷμα ἐκ τῆς ληνοῦ, Rev. 14:20). So, whereas the first account of judgement concluded simply with the pronouncement that the earth was harvested (ἐθερίσθη ἡ γῆ), the second account ends in a bloodbath. It is pictured in extraordinary proportions, with blood "[rising up] to the bridles of horses [for the distance] of one thousand six hundred stadia" (ἄχρι τῶν χαλινῶν τῶν ἵππων ἀπὸ σταδίων χιλίων ἑξακοσίων) suggesting an exceptional slaughter.<sup>377</sup> The horses may connect this judgement with that of the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:14, where his angelic companions also ride horses.<sup>378</sup> Alternatively, these horses may allude to the slaughtered horses of the rider's enemies in Rev. 19:18. This second option may be preferable because John used language in Rev. 14:20-15:3 that evokes the Israelite crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of the Egyptians.<sup>379</sup> If this is correct, the horses referenced in Rev. 14:20 are the horses of the wicked. In any case, the judgement imagery that had previously been only connected with the harvest transforms into bloody battle imagery.

The above observations on the judgement of Rev. 14:14-20 allow us to arrive at the following conclusions. First, the event that precipitates this judgement is the second coming of Christ, which is described in common early Christian imagery linked with this event. Second, two contrasting judgements are depicted. The first judgement concerns the saints, who are simply described as being harvested or gathered; the second describes the wicked, who are gathered, crushed and slaughtered. The location of the harvested grain is not disclosed although the immediate context describes God's Israel as victorious on the shores of the sea of glass located in heaven. John describes the grain harvest first. This suggests that priority in describing the judgements is given to the saints.<sup>380</sup> Third, common imagery, like the winepress of God, his

<sup>376</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 281; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 201; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 846.

<sup>377</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 848.

<sup>378</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:26; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 848.

<sup>379</sup> For instance, the victors gathered before a sea (Rev. 15:2; cf. Exod. 14:30), singing the song of Moses (Rev. 15:3 cf. Exod. 15:1), and horses engulfed in a torrent of blood or water (Rev. 14:20; cf. Exod. 15:1).

<sup>380</sup> This does not mean that the judgements are done at two different points in time. John probably thinks that they take place simultaneously. The point is that the saints are dealt with first because he gives them theological priority.



wrath, and the battle horses connect the judgement described in Rev. 14 with that in Rev. 19. These conclusions from Rev. 14:14-20 strengthen the previous conclusion that Rev. 19 also groups two contrasting images of the same event. In Rev. 14, the contrast is between two harvests, while in Rev. 19 the contrast is between two banquets. First, John deals with the saints who, like the harvest, are gathered as an offering to God and later he deals with the wicked who are rounded up for destruction in the most gruesome battle imagery.

A byproduct of these findings is that in the aftermath of the second coming the earth is void of all its human inhabitants. The harvest image shows that the saints were “gathered” and crossed over to the sea of glass in heaven (Rev. 14:16, 15:2). According to the wedding image the saints as a bride are transferred to the bridegroom’s home in heaven where they participate in the wedding festivities (Rev. 19:1-9). At the same time, none of the wicked are left alive on earth. The harvest of the grapes vividly describes the bloody judgement of the wicked (Rev. 14:17-20). Likewise, the gruesome image of the carrion-feeding birds feasting on the flesh of the unburied enemies of God signifies, as we noted in the previous chapter, the complete destruction of the wicked. With the saints gone to heaven and the wicked dead, the earth is completely desolate.<sup>381</sup>

The juxtaposition of two opposed fates may be due to John’s rhetorical strategy. The two fates are set side by side so that John’s readers will know the consequences of their choices. Both salvation and judgement are options that are real and available. The future is open and the question that remains is how the world will respond to it.<sup>382</sup>

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the two contrasting images may be part of John’s topical process of describing the future. It is quite evident that accurate chronological unfolding of events is not John’s primary concern in the telling of his prophecy. The repeated cases of *hysteron proteron*, and the repetition of events such as the second coming confirm this. Instead of telling a story chronologically, John provides the same story from different points of view often with parallel and contrasting images. This strategy both compares and distinguishes the saints from the wicked; the new Jerusalem from Babylon. As Bauckham suggests, it assists the readers in choosing wisely by revealing the final destination of the paths available to them, but in the process it also contrasts and highlights the differences between these two paths. At the

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<sup>381</sup> See also Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 146.

<sup>382</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 833; Richard Lehmann, “The Two Suppers,” in *Symposium on Revelation, Book 2: Exegetical & General Studies* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Inst., 1992), 221. This is essentially Bauckham’s solution for the diverse fates the nations seem to face in Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 21:24-26. Bauckham, *The Theology*, 102-3; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 309.

same time, however, the two fates are not alternatives for the future. Both harvests will take place; both banquets will be celebrated.

This chapter dealt with the question of the fate of the saints during the second coming, according to Revelation. It was shown that John used the imagery of wedding festivities to describe the gathering of the believers and their transfer to heaven where they joined celestial beings in praising God. The other image, that of the Divine Warrior described the desolation of the wicked. We will see that Rev. 20 reinforces the position that has been advocated in this chapter. It will be shown that the saints during the millennium are in heaven and the unbelievers remain dead. None of these fates suggest the hope of a second chance for the nations.

## 5. The binding of Satan

Rev. 20 may be one of the most controversial passages in the Bible.<sup>383</sup> The reason is probably that the notion of an interim kingdom for the saints is absent in both the HB and early Christian writings. John appears to be introducing a notion not found, at least explicitly, in any of these background materials that are his favourite quarries for stock images and theological concepts. It is no wonder then that this abrupt departure from John's norm creates questions for interpreters. The earlier chapters dealt with perhaps the most controversial issue of Rev. 20; namely its relationship to Rev. 19:11-21. Three main schools of interpretation: amillennialism, premillennialism, and postmillennialism were defined. Postmillennialism was not discussed because it holds that the millennium will be a period of peace and triumph for the gospel that will precede the second coming of Christ.<sup>384</sup> It maintains that Rev. 19:11-21 describes the "triumph of Christian principles in human affairs and the triumph of Christ through his church."<sup>385</sup> This position was refuted when it was argued in chapter 3 of this work that Rev. 19:11-21 represents the second coming of Christ and not the notion that the Divine Warrior evangelizes and converts the nations.<sup>386</sup> Additionally, chapter 2 of this study concluded that the vision of the battle in Rev. 20:7-10 does not recapitulate the message of Rev. 19:11-21 but proceeds in a generally linear chronological manner.<sup>387</sup> This means that the millennium described in Rev. 20 follows the second coming and does not lead into it. These conclusions favour the premillennial view of Rev. 20, although the position that will be argued below varies in some key respects from other premillennial approaches. At present, the only commitment made to premillennialism relates to its fundamental tenet that the second coming of Christ precedes the millennial reign of the saints.

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<sup>383</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 696. Christopher C. Rowland, *The New Interpreter's Bible: Hebrews - Revelation*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 706.

<sup>384</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 391; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 259-60. According to the postmillennial school of interpretation, the second coming is described in Rev. 20:7-10 and not in Rev. 19:11-21. "Today, postmillennialism is essentially abandoned". Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 574. For a postmillennial commentary see Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*.

<sup>385</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 260.

<sup>386</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 971. Beale says that for "example to say that the 'killing' of the Antichrist's followers 'by the sword proceeding from [Christ's] mouth' (19:21) refers to their conversion is to reverse the meaning of 19:11-19, of the punitive OT allusions therein, and especially of the Ps. 2:9 and Isa 11:4 pictures, both in their original contexts and, above all, in their prior use in Rev. 1:16 and 2:12, 16."

<sup>387</sup> This conclusion refutes amillennialism. As noted earlier, amillennialism usually interprets the millennium as the time of the church age and understands Rev. 20:1-6 as recapitulating events that happened prior to the second coming, not following it.

Another problem of Rev. 20 concerns the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:2. Commentators are divided over the significance and the extent of this event. Those adhering to the amillennial position generally describe the significance of the binding as limiting,<sup>388</sup> curbing,<sup>389</sup> or restraining<sup>390</sup> the devil's activities. In contrast, those who adhere to the premillennial position usually speak of the binding of Satan as absolute,<sup>391</sup> designed to render Satan completely inactive,<sup>392</sup> or implying the complete cessation of his influence. This discussion is essential for this study because the binding of Satan has direct implications on the nations and their deception in particular. If Satan's binding is complete, it is important to understand its significance, especially in the light of the conclusion in the previous chapter that suggested that all the nations were destroyed in battle. Although the extent of the binding will be dealt with earlier, its symbolic meaning will be explained fully in chapter 5.4.

The abyss in John's scenario of Satan's imprisonment is the location of Satan's incarceration. Some people equate the abyss with Hades, the domain of the dead. This position will be assessed below. The background of the abyss as a location suitable for demonic imprisonment will also be considered in chapter 5.2.

The millennial reign poses equally controversial issues for many scholars. What is the purpose of this interim kingdom, which is absent from both the HB and other New Testament texts? Most seem to assume that it envisions an earthly kingdom in which the promises of the HB will come to fulfilment.<sup>393</sup> A closer examination, however, shows that this view is inadequate.<sup>394</sup> It is vital for our correct understanding of the millennium events to figure out the purpose and intent of this episode in the eschatology of Revelation.<sup>395</sup> Moreover, two resurrections occur at the beginning and the end of the millennial reign. It is not clear who takes part in these resurrections and what their purpose is.<sup>396</sup> Is there a suggestion from the text that those who have been resurrected are the nations that would be given a chance of repentance?

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<sup>388</sup> Larsen, "Neglected Considerations in Understanding the Structure of the Book of Revelation," 232.

<sup>389</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 245.

<sup>390</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 986.

<sup>391</sup> Powell, "Progression versus Recapitulation in Revelation 20," 96.

<sup>392</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1966), 292-93.

<sup>393</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 183.

<sup>394</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 183-84.

<sup>395</sup> See chapter 6.

<sup>396</sup> See chapter 5.4 and chapter 7.

Yet another question with no obvious answer is the location of the millennial kingdom. Is it located on earth as many premillennial scholars claim, or in heaven as the imagery of the thrones suggests?<sup>397</sup> At first, these questions seem to have little significance for the topic of the fate of the nations. However, any discussion of the nations ought to provide a reasonably consistent interpretation of the millennium. A theory about the fate of the nations that leaves substantial gaps in the narrative would seem implausible.<sup>398</sup>

Last, the image of the judgement before the great white throne is relevant to our discussion. It was proposed in chapter 2 that this image recaps the events of the war narrated in Rev. 20:7-10. This theory will have to be further supported. If these two images, that of the war and judgement, refer to the same event, then they need to be considered together.<sup>399</sup> Furthermore, Rev. 20:15 consigns those whose names have not been found in the book of life to the lake of fire. In Rev. 20:14, John explains that this lake is the second death. In order to understand the fate of these people, then, we have to study these terms carefully and explore their rhetorical significance in Revelation.<sup>400</sup> With these considerations in mind, this chapter will begin with Satan's binding.

## 5.1 Satan's binding

Rev. 20 begins with an angelic descent from heaven. Elsewhere in Revelation, the descending angel is often designated as "mighty" but this epithet is missing here.<sup>401</sup> Some manuscripts call him "other" (ἄλλος). The variant was probably introduced to distinguish this angel from that mentioned in Rev. 19:17.<sup>402</sup> John gives a great deal more consideration to the accessories of this angel; he holds the key to the abyss, and a great chain in his hand.

### 5.1.1 The identity of the angel

An angel with the key to the abyss descends and binds Satan. Keys have been mentioned three other times in Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1. In the first two passages, the bearer of the keys is

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<sup>397</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 234.

<sup>398</sup> The location of the millennial reign will be identified in chapter 6.4.5.

<sup>399</sup> See chapter 7.5.

<sup>400</sup> See chapter 8.

<sup>401</sup> Three times in Revelation John encounters an angel that he describes as mighty (Rev. 5:2; 10:1, 18:21).

<sup>402</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1072. ἄλλος is attested by  $\kappa^2$ , 2050, ( $\delta^s$  pc) vg<sup>ms</sup> sy<sup>ph</sup> sa<sup>ms</sup>; Bea. The phrase ἄλλος ἄγγελος occurs 10 times, in Rev. 7:2; 8:3; 10:1; 14:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18; 18:1.

unmistakably the risen Christ.<sup>403</sup> By virtue of his resurrection he holds the keys of death and Hades.<sup>404</sup> In Rev. 3:7, Jesus claims for himself the authority over who enters his kingdom.<sup>405</sup> The last reference, Rev. 9:1 is more obscure. This passage speaks of the key to the abyss, which is more relevant to Rev. 20:1 which also mentions the key.<sup>406</sup> In Rev. 9:1 as well, the key is found in the possession of a star (i.e., an angel, see Rev. 1:20) that had fallen to earth. Scholars are divided over the identity of this fallen angel. Some believe him to be a demon that was exiled from heaven like Satan in Rev. 12:7-9.<sup>407</sup> Others note that if the angel of Rev. 9:1 is a demon, it would mark the only instance in which God used an evil angel to execute his will,<sup>408</sup> and therefore conclude that the angel of Rev. 9:1 is a good angel that came from heaven.<sup>409</sup> Since some commentators assume that the angel of Rev. 20:1 is identical to that of Rev. 9:1 it is important to include the latter passage in this study.

The difficulty in identifying the angel of Rev. 9:1 is that he is said to have fallen (πεπτωκότα) on the earth. Osborne, following Charles's explanation, argues that the word "fallen" may simply refer to his descent, and not to his nature.<sup>410</sup> For proof they cite 1 En. 86:1; 88:1. These references are from the Animal Apocalypse where the fall of Azazel and other evil angels is described in 1 En. 86:1, 3.<sup>411</sup> Since there are no extant Greek manuscripts covering these chapters, it is impossible to know whether the word πίπτω was used in Greek 1 En.<sup>412</sup> Isaac's translation of the extant Ethiopic text refers to stars that "fall" or "descend" in 1 En. 86:1, 3, but does not call these figures "fallen stars."<sup>413</sup> Moreover, in both instances of 1 En, the text mentions the descent of *evil* watchers. Therefore, these passages are not the best candidates to prove that the word πίπτω refers to mere descent since they are references to fallen angels.

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<sup>403</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

<sup>404</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 96.

<sup>405</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 116; Osborne, *Revelation*, 187. This claim will be discussed further in chapter 9.5.

<sup>406</sup> Steven Thompson, "The End of Satan," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 37, no. 2 (Autumn 1999): 261.

<sup>407</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 491-92; Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 145; Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 154-55; Boring, *Revelation*, 136.

<sup>408</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 362.

<sup>409</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 455-56; Osborne, *Revelation*, 362; Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 1:239.

<sup>410</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 362; Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1:238-39.

<sup>411</sup> J. T. Milik, ed., *Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumran Cave 4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 43.

<sup>412</sup> The Ethiopic text is probably a translation from a lost Greek text, although it is possible that behind the Ethiopic text lies an Aramaic original. Isaac, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," 6.

<sup>413</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 491.

On closer observation, Charles' argument seems to be that when the word *πίπτω* refers to inanimate objects such as a star, it refers to its descent.<sup>414</sup> However, if the word *πίπτω* describes the course of an angel then the word refers to his spiritual fall.<sup>415</sup> Charles concludes that because John speaks of a fallen *star* (εἶδον ἀστέρα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν), he simply indicates that a star had descended from heaven. Charles's argument is problematic in Rev. 9:1 because John immediately specifies that the fallen star was given the key to the shaft of the abyss. Clearly a star cannot be given or operate a key. It seems then that even though John uses the imagery of the star, he expects his readers to understand it as an angel. This is also the problem with Koester's argument in citing Rev. 6:13 and Rev. 8:10 as proof that the falling of stars does not signify God's judgement against the stars.<sup>416</sup> In both instances, the stars that fall are not clearly identified as angels; in fact, they are probably references to inanimate objects falling, unlike Rev. 9:1 that refers to an angel.<sup>417</sup> Since angels are usually conceived of as moral beings who can choose between right and wrong, their "fall" might easily indicate their nature.

An alternative position comes from Thompson, who argues that the angel to whom the key to the shaft of the abyss was given was the fifth angel that sounded a trumpet. Thompson observes that the Greek words for star and angel are both masculine and therefore they both can be candidates for the masculine personal pronoun αὐτῷ (to him).<sup>418</sup> Thompson is correct grammatically, although his proposal makes the reading somewhat awkward since the personal pronoun would refer to the angel that appears a clause earlier. This is probably why Mathewson claims that the antecedent of αὐτῷ is ἀστὴρ.<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, the trumpeting angels up to this point only announce the plagues that befall the earth, and do not participate actively in them. In the sixth seal, the angel who sounds the trumpet also loosens the four angels, but John specifically informs his readers that this angel who had the sixth trumpet was told to do so (Rev. 9:14). Thompson's understanding of the text has the fifth angel actively involved in this plague

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<sup>414</sup> So Koester, who notes that the fall of stars in Rev. 6:13; 8:10 signify judgements against the earth, not against the stars. Koester, *Revelation*, 456. Koester fails to notice that the passages he mentioned actually speak of heavenly bodies, not otherworldly beings such as angels.

<sup>415</sup> "It is different, however, when the subject of *πίπτειν* is not a star but an angel. Good or bad angels "descend" (1 Enoch vi.6), but only bad angels "fall" (Luke x. 18) or are "cast down" (Apoc. xii.9)." Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 1:239.

<sup>416</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

<sup>417</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525.

<sup>418</sup> Thompson, "The End of Satan," 261.

<sup>419</sup> David Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 116.

by opening the abyss, although John does not explicitly tell the readers that the angel got involved. This is also problematic because such an interpretation would mean that the star that fell from heaven had no effect whatsoever on the plague. In the previous plagues after the trumpeting of the angels, hail (Rev. 8:7), a mountain (Rev. 8:8), a great star (Rev. 8:10), the sun, moon and stars (Rev. 8:12) all had an effect on earth, sea, rivers, and the brightness of heavenly bodies respectively. If Thompson's proposal is correct, then the falling star plays no role at all in the plague that ensues, and the statement about the falling star is meaningless since the star does not open the shaft to the abyss and does not seem to participate in the narrative in any other meaningful way. It is best therefore to understand that the key to the shaft of the abyss was given to the fallen star who undoubtedly represents an angel.

The conclusion that the falling angel of Rev. 9:1 is not a good angel but a fallen one is also supported by Rev. 9:11. There, the angel of the abyss is called in Hebrew 'Αβαδδών that means destruction or in Greek 'Απολλύων that means destroyer and is clearly a demonic being since he is called the king of the locust-like beings (Rev. 9:11).<sup>420</sup> These two angelic references in Rev. 9 form an *inclusio* and are probably references to the same evil angel.<sup>421</sup>

This means that the fallen star of Rev. 9:1 cannot be the same angel as Rev. 20:1 who does not “fall” to the earth but “descends” (καταβαίνοντα).<sup>422</sup> Although both angels seem to have the key to the abyss, their actions are significantly different. Whereas the angel of Rev. 9:1 frees demonic beings, in Rev. 20:1 the angel's purpose is the reverse. His mission is to incarcerate Satan.<sup>423</sup> In addition, the authority of the angel in Rev. 9:1 is given to him (ἐδόθη αὐτῷ). John is employing the divine passive to clarify that this angel's key was not his to use but that he was “given sovereignty” by God and operated under divine permission.<sup>424</sup> In later visions, John similarly employs the divine passive to explain how the beast from the abyss is permitted by God to carry out its evil plans (Rev. 13:5, 7).<sup>425</sup> The fact that the divine passive, or even a divine command is absent from Rev. 20:1 suggests that the angel is not given

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<sup>420</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 492. Contra Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 525. Aune understands that the star should be seen as an angelic messenger. Although he argues at length that a “fallen star” is a reference to *fallen* supernatural being, he does not consider it a reference to the angel of the abyss. It is not clear how this being is both fallen and a messenger (presumably from God). If this fallen being is not good, and has the key to the abyss (which denotes authority), then why he is not the Destroyer, the king of the evil army of locusts of Rev. 9:11?

<sup>421</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 362.

<sup>422</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 493. Contra Osborne, 699.

<sup>423</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

<sup>424</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 493; Sweet, *Revelation*, 167.

<sup>425</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456.



permission to act, but in contrast to the angel of Rev. 9:1 has his own authority to act. The two angels of Rev. 9:1 and 20:1 are not parallel but in contrast, not only in nature (evil vs good) but also in mission (free vs bound demons) and authority (given vs one's own). If the first angel is Satan, the king of the demonic forces (Rev. 9:11) and the fallen dragon of Rev. 12:9, the angel of Rev. 20:1 may be a symbol, or represent Jesus, who is the rightful key guardian in Revelation (Rev. 1:18; 3:7).<sup>426</sup> This proposal would also fit the immediate context of Rev. 20:1. In the previous vision, John described the victorious charge of Jesus as the Divine Warrior and his victory over the evil forces. The problem with this theory is that the description of the angel lacks any adjectives pronouncing his power, authority or greatness as we would expect in describing Jesus. Thompson, who does not identify this angel with Jesus, suggests that the "absence of any reference to the status or title" of this angel serves "to focus attention on the full sovereignty of God."<sup>427</sup> The simplicity of the angel's description also draws attention to his actions as he conclusively and effortlessly defeats his opponent. His description as ἄγγελος may not be a description of his nature but a statement of his divine mission. The primary meaning of ἄγγελος in Greek is "messenger"<sup>428</sup> and so is its Hebrew counterpart.<sup>429</sup> John's use of the word ἄγγελος may therefore emphasize the divine sanction of the angel's activities. This suggestion is not very different from the amillennial interpretation which considers the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 a reference to Christ's defeat of Satan through his death and resurrection (see Matt. 12:29; Col. 2:15).<sup>430</sup> However, in this proposed interpretation the binding of Satan occurs after his eschatological defeat at the hands of Jesus the Divine Warrior<sup>431</sup> and not after his earlier defeat during the crucifixion and resurrection.

In conclusion, the angel with the key to the abyss in Rev. 20 is contrasted with the angel of Rev. 9:1. Whereas in Rev. 9:1 the angel was probably the devil, the destroyer, in Rev. 20 the angel is probably Jesus who, by virtue of his conclusive victory over the devil in Rev. 19:11-21, is able to arrest him and bind him in the abyss.

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<sup>426</sup> Chilton identifies this angel as Jesus who has complete control of the abyss as well. Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, 198.

<sup>427</sup> Thompson, "The End of Satan," 263.

<sup>428</sup> LSJ, s.v. "ἄγγελος."

<sup>429</sup> The Hebrew counterpart word מַלְאָךְ also means messenger. *HALOT* s.v. "מַלְאָךְ".

<sup>430</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985. Beale however does not make the case that this ἄγγελος is Jesus. Nevertheless, he claims that the "restraint of Satan is a direct result of Christ's resurrection."

<sup>431</sup> Jesus as the Divine Warrior acts as a God's messenger, doing his bidding in Rev. 19:15 when he is portrayed as trampling the winepress of the wrath of God.

### 5.1.2 The chain

Apart from the keys, the angel of Rev. 20:1 carries also a great chain in his hand. Since chains were used to bind “war captives (2 Kgs 25:7; Jer. 40:1; Josephus, *J.W.* 3:402; Tacitus, *Ann.* 12:36) and other prisoners,”<sup>432</sup> binding Satan in the aftermath of the war against the Divine Warrior is appropriate. The purpose of the chain is probably to intensify John’s prison imagery,<sup>433</sup> since prisoners were often chained (see Acts 12:6). The fact that the chain is described as “great” (μεγάλην) could be a reference to the notoriety of the prisoner (i.e., the most infamous prisoner must be subdued with a greater than normal chain). Furthermore, the weight of a great chain can form part of the punishment since a great chain will be a heavier burden to carry in his cell. In the *Book of the Similitudes*, a chapter that has considerable affinities with Rev. 20 describes “kings and potentates” thrown into a fiery valley that is called the abyss (1 En. 54, cf. Rev. 20:3). There Enoch notices “chains” and “iron fetters of immense weight” (1 En. 54:3, cf. Rev. 20:1). The *angelus interpretes* that accompanies Enoch explains that these chains have been prepared for the armies of Azaz’el,<sup>434</sup> who led those who dwell upon the earth astray (1 En. 54:6, cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 20:8). It seems that in 1 En. 54:3 the heavy weight of the chains was part of the punishment. Alternatively, according to Osborne the bulk of the chain may indicate its effectiveness. Satan may try, like the demoniac in Mark. 5:4, to break his chains but he will not succeed because “this chain is too great for that, even for the dragon himself.”<sup>435</sup> John probably described the chain as great for all these reasons because of its effectiveness and suitability in subduing the great dragon, as well as a means of punishment.

### 5.1.3 Arrested, bound, thrown, confounded and sealed.

Immediately after the portrayal of the angel, John describes the angel’s actions with five active verbs: ἐκράτησεν, ἔδησεν, ἔβαλεν, ἔκλεισεν, ἐσφράγισεν (arrested, bound, threw, shut up, sealed).<sup>436</sup> The Satan’s powerlessness is evident in his complete inability to even defend himself.<sup>437</sup> The passage lacks any elements of a cosmic conflict because as Thompson points

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<sup>432</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 769.

<sup>433</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 700.

<sup>434</sup> According to Hartley, Azazel (or its variants in 1 Enoch, Azaz’el in Ethiopic and Azaël in Greek) was the name of the principal evil spirits in the later intertestamental literature. John Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1992), 238.

<sup>435</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 700.

<sup>436</sup> Thompson, “The End of Satan,” 263.

<sup>437</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 700.

out “resistance is both impossible and pointless.”<sup>438</sup> The verbs lay out a sequential order that leads progressively to Satan’s incarceration. First, Satan is laid hold of or arrested. The verb κρατέω is used to mean taking hold of something, often forcibly.<sup>439</sup> It describes John the Baptist’s arrest (κρατήσας) at the hands of Herod in Matt. 14:3. Similarly, Matthew also uses ἔδησεν just like John in Rev. 20:2, highlighting how these words were standard terminology for arresting and binding an individual before his imprisonment.

After the arrest and binding, Satan is thrown (ἔβαλεν) into the abyss. The word ἔβαλεν recalls Michael’s throwing (ἐβλήθη) the dragon out of heaven in Rev. 12:9. The two passages not only share the same notion of Satan’s expulsion but identify God’s adversary by all the same names in the same order: ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς (Rev. 12:9). This compares to Rev. 20:2, where Satan is called τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.<sup>440</sup> Giesen argues that the list of Satan’s names supports the notion of Christ as the messianic judge in Rev. 19:17-21. This list sounds like an official legal sentence on the accused about to be handed down. Christ is able to prevail since he knows all the names of his adversary and has a reserved a name for himself “that no one knows but himself” Rev. 19:12.<sup>441</sup> If Giesen’s proposal is correct, this may further corroborate the view that the angel who binds Satan is a symbolic representation of Christ and links the action of the angel in Rev. 20:1-3 firmly to the action of Christ in Rev. 19:11-21.

Once Satan was thrown into the abyss the angel locked him up and sealed it, presumably the entrance. The shutting up is described by the word ἔκλεισεν, probably indicating that the shutting or locking employed the angel’s key (τὴν κλεῖν, Rev. 20:1).<sup>442</sup> Sealing the door is the last means to secure Satan’s prison. According to Swete, this sealing is parallel to the sealing of Jesus’s tomb by the priests in Matt. 27:66. The sealing of a prison ensured that any attempt at rescue or escape would not pass unnoticed and thus further secured the inmate.<sup>443</sup> All the

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<sup>438</sup> Thompson, “The End of Satan,” 263.

<sup>439</sup> LSJ, s.v. “κρατέω.”

<sup>440</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 262.

<sup>441</sup> Heinz Giesen and Josef Eckert, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, Regensburger Neues Testament (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1997), 430, cited in Osborne, *Revelation*, 700. Aune also cites Jewish magical texts in which evil names are recited as in Rev. 20:2 in order to bind and seal evil. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1083.

<sup>442</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 770.

<sup>443</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 261.

angel's actions are plainly designed to render Satan completely helpless and place him in an absolutely secure situation from which he cannot possibly escape.<sup>444</sup>

## 5.2 The abyss

Satan's prison is identified as the abyss (ἄβυσσος). This designation too may have been fashioned to demonstrate Satan's complete inability to deceive. The word means bottomless.<sup>445</sup> The abyss in Revelation is the realm of demonic beings, the place from where the beast ascends (Rev. 11:7, 17:8) and whence the locust-like army attacked the earth (Rev. 9:3). This suggests a low, possibly subterranean place. However, it is different from the area under the earth (ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς, Rev. 5:3, 13) where creatures that praise God dwell and also different from hades (ᾗδης, Rev. 1:18, 20:13, 14) which is the location of the dead or a reference to the grave (equivalent to the Sheol of the HB).<sup>446</sup>

It may be instructive to compare the Enochian abyss with that of Revelation.<sup>447</sup> The abyss in Revelation shares some features with that of Enoch but also shows some differences. In Revelation, demonic beings and Satan can be released from the abyss (Rev. 9:1-3; 20:3), whereas the abyss in 1 Enoch seems to be forever (1 En. 21:10).<sup>448</sup> Another difference from 1 Enoch is that the abyss in Revelation is not a place of fire.<sup>449</sup> 1 Enoch is not the work of one author and therefore offers multiple views on the abyss. In some cases, the meaning of the abyss in 1 Enoch accords with the semantic meaning of the word in the Greek literature and refers to oceans or watery bodies where Leviathan dwells (1 En. 60:7), or the deep waters into which the earth sank during the flood (1 En. 83:4). However, the abyss in 1 En. 54:5 is described as a valley of fire and in 1 En. 90:24 as a place "full of fire and flame and full of the pillar of fire". The *Dream Visions* speak of multiple abysses as is evident from 1 En. 90:26 when Enoch says that "I saw how another abyss...". This may be why the abyss in 1 En. 88:1 lacks a reference

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<sup>444</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 701. Thompson, "The End of Satan," 266. Matt Waymeyer, "The Binding of Satan in Revelation 20," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 46.

<sup>445</sup> LSJ, s.v. "βυθός."

<sup>446</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456. Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 147.

<sup>447</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1078-79; Koester, *Revelation*, 770; Reddish, *Revelation*, 380; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 352.

<sup>448</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 457.

<sup>449</sup> Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 147. Contra Koester, *Revelation*, 457.

to fire but is a place “narrow and deep, empty and dark”. Only here in 1 Enoch is the abyss described specifically as a *dark* place.<sup>450</sup>

In contrast to 1 Enoch, none of the descriptions of the abyss in Revelation mention fire.<sup>451</sup> Although smoke is mentioned in connection with the abyss in Rev. 9:2-3, there is no mention of fire, and the furnace is mentioned not in association with flames or fire but with smoke.<sup>452</sup> John does not say that the abyss was flaming like a furnace but rather that smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace (ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου, Rev. 9:2). Therefore, the furnace is mentioned not because of its association with fire but because it produces smoke. Smoke is not always an indication of fire, since in apocalyptic literature it is also associated with a theophany.<sup>453</sup> In Rev. 15:8 when God’s glory enters the temple it is filled with smoke.<sup>454</sup> In Rev. 9:2, the purpose of the smoke is not a theophany but to introduce another quality of the smoke, namely that of darkness.<sup>455</sup> The smoke from the abyss darkens the sun (Rev. 9:2). Since fire plays no role in Rev. 9:2 or in the plague the fifth trumpet announces, fire is not mentioned at all. This notion of darkness characterizing the abyss is similar to 1 En. 88:1 where the abyss is portrayed as a dark place. Elsewhere in 1 En. 10:4, the prison of the fallen chief watcher Azazel is described as “the darkness” (εἰς τὸ σκότος) although its location is the desert of Dadouel and not the abyss. In Revelation, the fiery judgement of Satan does not occur in the abyss but in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10).

Despite these differences, the Enochian abyss has some striking similarities with Revelation. First, it is the place where the seven wandering stars were thrown (ἐρριμμένους 1 En. 21:3), bound (δεδεμένους 1 En. 21:3) and imprisoned. In fact, on several occasions it is called a “prison” for the “stars and the powers of heaven” (δεσμωτήριον ... τοῖς ἀστροῖς καὶ ταῖς δυνάμεσιν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 1 En. 18:14).

The portrayal of the prison of the angels is also interesting. In 1 En. 18:11, it is described as a chasm (χάσμα) which suggests emptiness. The dimensions of this depth or height (βάθος, ὕψος) are immeasurable (οὐκ ἔνν μέτρον, 1 En. 18:11). The lack of depth suggests the place is an

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<sup>450</sup> Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 261.

<sup>451</sup> Koester mistakenly claims that in Revelation “the abyss is filled with fire and smoke.” Koester, *Revelation*, 457.

<sup>452</sup> According to Ladd, there is nothing in the text to suggest that the smoke here represents the fires of hell. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 131.

<sup>453</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 363.

<sup>454</sup> See also Ps. 104:32; 144:5 and Isa. 6:3-4 for smoke denoting a theophany and not the presence of fire.

<sup>455</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 147.

abyss whose very definition means bottomless.<sup>456</sup> The word abyss reappears in Enoch's description in 1 En. 21:7, where Enoch clearly describes the same location since in both passages he speaks of a place with pillars of fire (πλήρης στύλων πυρός, 1 En. 21:7 cf. 1 En. 18:11). Above this place there is no firmament (στερέωμα οὐρανοῦ, 1 En 18:12) or founded earth (γῆ ... τεθεμελιωμένη, 1 En 18:12). The passage is clearly influenced by the creation account in Genesis 1 and describes the prison of the fallen angels as an abyss in terms of primordial conditions (without a firmament 1 En. 18:12 cf. Gen 1:6-7, and the earth as yet unfounded 1 En. 18:12 cf. Gen. 1:9). The influence of Gen. 1:9 is also apparent in the Ethiopic translation describing the waters as gathering together.<sup>457</sup> The allusions to Gen. 1 continue in 1 En. 21:1 where the location of the prison of the fallen stars is portrayed as a primordial state earth. Isaac translates the verse as: "And I came to an empty place" (1 En. 21:1), stipulating that the text literally reads "where nothing is done". This is comparable to the Greek text which reads ἐφώδευσα ἕως τῆς ἀκατασκευάστου "I went on till the unmade [place]."<sup>458</sup> This description is related to the LXX translation of Genesis 1:2 where the earth is said to be ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος.<sup>459</sup> It appears that Enoch's effort to describe the location of the fallen angels as a terrible and fearful place resorts to language and images describing the earth before its creation. Whereas God's creation has given order to the chaotic state of the earth,<sup>460</sup> the location of the prison of these angels ought to be a place without order, without heaven and earth, just chaos.

Enoch's image of devastation is related to Jeremiah's comparable description. After the great battle, the earth is described thus:

I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. Jer. 4:23-26 NRSV

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<sup>456</sup> In fact, Charles translates this chasm as "abyss". R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007), 45.

<sup>457</sup> Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 160.

<sup>458</sup> Translation mine. My translation is intended to be literal. Black's translation is more dynamic and underlines the allusion to Gen. 1:2: "And I went on to a formless void". Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 37.

<sup>459</sup> Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 164.

<sup>460</sup> Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 21.

The expression “waste and void” in Jer. 4:23 is a translation of the Hebrew (תָּהוּ וָבֵהוּ) which is the identical expression of Gen. 1:2 translated by the LXX as ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος and relates to 1 En. 21:1 (τῆς [γῆς] ἀκατασκευάστου). The desolate land in Jer. 4:26 corresponds to 1 En. 18:12 where the place is described as ἔρημος καὶ φοβερός. The fleeing of birds in Jer. 4:25 (πάντα τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἐπτοεῖτο) also corresponds to 1 En. 18:12 (οὔτε πετεινόν). It appears that the devastating battle in Jer. 4 brings the earth to a chaotic, primordial state,<sup>461</sup> similar to that of its state before the creation. This same state is used by the author of 1 Enoch to describe the abyss in which the seven fallen stars are imprisoned. However, the theme of demonic imprisonment is notably absent from Jer. 4.

Another passage often cited as a background for Satan’s imprisonment in Rev. 20 is Isa. 24:21-23.<sup>462</sup> The passage concludes a prophecy about the devastation of the earth that began in Isa. 24:1.<sup>463</sup> The judgement it describes is universal, not local concerning only the land of Israel.<sup>464</sup> This is also reflected by the fact that the “earth” (אֶרֶץ) of Isa. 24:1 is translated as οἰκουμένη in LXX which refers to the inhabited world. The prophecy describes an earth that has suffered the loss of social structure (Isa. 24:2), only few of the earth’s inhabitants are left (Isa. 24:6), all expressions of enjoyment and gladness are silenced (Isa. 24:7-11), and the cities are left in ruins (Isa. 24:12-13). As the prophecy proceeds, the devastation takes on cosmic dimensions and God’s judgement is described as a repetition of the flood (Isa. 24:18).<sup>465</sup> The earth will stagger like a drunkard until it falls, never to rise again (Isa. 24:20). The prophecy concludes with the punishment of both the host of the heavens, and the kings of the earth. They will be imprisoned in a dungeon for many days, only to be released for their ultimate punishment (Isa. 24:22). Who should be identified with the “host of the heavens” imprisoned in Isa. 24:21 is not clear. Some commentators think that since Isaiah 24 predates the Enochic tradition of fallen angels, Isaiah cannot mean the imprisonment of angels but rather he speaks of the imprisonment of “the pantheon of pagan gods.”<sup>466</sup> Others suggest that it signifies the angelic army, especially the angels of the nations and kingdoms assigned to these nations.<sup>467</sup>

<sup>461</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 8:74.

<sup>462</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 576; Koester, *Revelation*, 770; Roloff, *Revelation*, 226.

<sup>463</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 327.

<sup>464</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, trans. James Martin, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 277-78.

<sup>465</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, 7:281. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 329, 332.

<sup>466</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 700.

<sup>467</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, 7:282.

The theory that angels were assigned to nations is found in Deut. 32:8 (LXX and DSS text) and confirmed in Dan. 10:13.<sup>468</sup> It is possible that John understood Isaiah's account of the imprisoned heavenly host in light of the tradition in 1 Enoch. Christian circles apparently did not consider Enoch a pseudonymous work (see Jude 1:14). It is conceivable that John accepted some Enochian writings as authored by Enoch. This makes it plausible that John understood Isaiah's imprisoned heavenly host as fallen angels according to the theology of 1 Enoch.

Isa. 24 then provides a background similar to the abyss prison of the fallen spirits of 1 En. The judgement follows the corruption of the whole earth whose flood-like destruction returns the earth to a chaotic state.<sup>469</sup> The place of the confinement of the heavenly host and the kings of the nations is described as a pit and a prison. In that respect, the Isa. 24 passage diverges in that it portrays the prison as a pit (בֹּר) in which human kings are also imprisoned. Moreover, the passage does not infer a future release of those imprisoned as Revelation expects for Satan (Rev. 20:3).

This brief study on the abyss demonstrates that there was no common definition of what the abyss looked like or what function it served. For some it was a watery body, for others a fiery place, while for others darkness was its dominant characteristic. Most assume however, that the abyss was a terrible place separated from God's creation and only suitable for the imprisonment and confinement of demonic beings. Once confined to the abyss, the devil or demons lack the freedom to exert influence. This is clearly the point of the abyss in Revelation as stipulated in Rev. 20:3,<sup>470</sup> a conclusion reinforced by Rev. 9:1 in which the demonic beings are released only after the shaft of the abyss was unlocked and opened. If the devil could deceive the nations while in the abyss then the whole metaphor is meaningless. Contrary to the other abyss passages where the imprisonment of the demonic being is permanent, Revelation allows for a brief release of Satan. However, John stipulates that Satan's release will be for a short time (Rev. 20:3). The similarities allow us to compare John's incarceration of Satan with the description of other demonic imprisonments. At the same time, the differences indicate that John is the master of his text and ultimately rearranges his material with his rules and for his own purposes.

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<sup>468</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, 7:282-83.

<sup>469</sup> Incidentally, in the Genesis account the flood is also being portrayed as the "decreation" of earth that is followed by a "recreation". Turner, *Genesis*, 49.

<sup>470</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 577.



### 5.3 The purpose of the metaphor according to scholars adhering to amillennialism

As already noted, scholars who adhere to an amillennial interpretation of Rev. 20 understand the binding of Satan to mean a partial curtailing of his abilities. Since Beale defends the notion that the binding of Satan suggests only limiting Satan's activities, I will deal specifically with his arguments. Beale claims that the intention of the metaphor is to show that Jesus is sovereign over Satan and his demonic forces. Beale claims that the context, not the metaphor itself, should determine the degree of the intended restriction.<sup>471</sup> In his opinion, the context is not the eschatological battle of the Divine Warrior with Satan, but Christ's victory over death by his resurrection.

Beale's fundamental presupposition is that the key of the abyss is "the key of death and of Hades" that Christ holds in Rev. 1:18.<sup>472</sup> Christ owns this key by virtue of his resurrection. The same key, according to Beale, is also described in Rev. 3, where it shows that Christ has the authority "to impart spiritual life in the present age. This imparting of life includes preventing the devil from any longer deceiving the members of the 'synagogue of Satan' in Philadelphia so that they can come to the truth and receive spiritual life."<sup>473</sup> For Rev. 6 describing the opening of the fourth seal, Beale proposes that Christ's influence over the sphere of the dead is amplified during the inter-advent age and, likewise, the key of the shaft of the abyss in Rev. 9:1-2 represents God's authority over the demonic powers dwelling "in the realm of the dead."<sup>474</sup>

Beale's attempt to equate the keys of death and Hades in Rev. 1:18 with the key of the abyss in Rev. 9:1-2 and Rev. 20:1 stems from his understanding that the binding of Satan in Rev. 20:1 took place when Satan was defeated by Christ's death and resurrection. In his opinion, this binding symbolizes Christ's power over the powers of Satan. However, Beale never proves that the realm of death and Hades should be equated with the abyss. He simply assumes it.<sup>475</sup> There are good reasons why this is not the case. First, John uses these different terms, "death

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<sup>471</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985.

<sup>472</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984.

<sup>473</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984.

<sup>474</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984.

<sup>475</sup> "The 'abyss' in 9:1-2 and 20:1 is probably a synonym for 'death and Hades'. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984. Other amillennialists also follow suit: "As we have seen in Rev. 9, the abyss is symbolic of death and Hades." But Riddlebarger does not prove this assertion; he simply cites Beale. Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 202-3.

and Hades” on the one hand and “abyss” on the other. Why use different terms for the same place? In fact, Revelation differentiates between them. “Death and Hades” represent the realm of the dead, a place equivalent to the Hebrew term “Sheol” (שְׁאוֹל) and the destination of all who die.<sup>476</sup> In the HB, Sheol (commonly translated as Hades in the LXX)<sup>477</sup> is not the place of an eschatological punishment but the destiny of all the dead, good or bad. In fact, “[Sheol/Hades] becomes the home of respected figures like Jacob, Job, or David as well as of the bloodthirsty Joab or the idolatrous king of Babylon.”<sup>478</sup> The place is often equated with the grave.<sup>479</sup> Likewise, Papaioannou concludes that the significance of Hades for the New Testament is the same as in the HB and mostly a reference to death.<sup>480</sup> In Revelation, the phrase “death and Hades” appears four times (Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). In none of these does Hades signify the abode of demonic spirits. On the contrary, in all these cases it is somewhat related to death and the grave, so that Koester correctly concludes that Hades is where “the dead are kept until the final resurrection.”<sup>481</sup>

The abyss in Revelation is however the prison or home of demonic beings, the beast and Satan (Rev. 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3).<sup>482</sup> In no instance where the abyss is mentioned are the dead (wicked or saints) associated with it. Since John consistently assigns different beings to Hades and the abyss, these places ought to be considered as distinct.

Beale’s arguments for Christ’s authority over death due to his resurrection contributes little to the discussion if death and Hades are not identical to the abyss of Rev. 20:1. Satan is not bound and imprisoned in the abyss as a direct consequence of his death. Nowhere in the text is Satan said to be killed and thus taken to Hades for imprisonment.<sup>483</sup> On the contrary,

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<sup>476</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 247.

<sup>477</sup> Theodore J. Lewis, “Dead, Abode of The,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 2:101-105.

<sup>478</sup> Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 86-87.

<sup>479</sup> Papaioannou, 88. Osborne, *Revelation*, 96.

<sup>480</sup> Papaioannou examines all the reference of Hades in the synoptics and Acts, concluding that Matthew and Acts align with the HB meaning of Sheol. Due to insufficient evidence he defers judgment whether Luke 10:15 refers to the final judgment or is simply a reference to death or Capernaum’s destruction. As far as the last reference of Luke 16:23 is concerned, he concludes that Luke uses the parable in order to deconstruct popular views on the afterlife. Since the parable is used “as a parody on popular tales” of the afterlife it should not be used to construct our “understanding of Luke’s use of Hades.” Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 135.

<sup>481</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 769. See also Reddish, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>482</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 783.

<sup>483</sup> Hades is always linked with death in Revelation. Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 55.

Satan is captured, arrested and imprisoned (like the watchers in 1 En.88:1, or the seven stars<sup>484</sup> in 1 En. 18:13) to be judged later. The context of Rev. 20:1 is not the victory Christ achieved by his resurrection over death (as in Rev. 1:18), but the eschatological victory over Satan in Rev. 19:11-21.

Furthermore, Beale's effort to equate "death and Hades" with the abyss makes several inexact statements. First, he states that "'the key of the abyss' is probably the same as the 'the key of death and of Hades,'...".<sup>485</sup> Beale uses the singular to describe the "key" of death and Hades. In fact, John uses the plural *κλεῖς* in Rev. 1:18 and the singular *κλεῖν* in Rev. 20:1. This inaccuracy brings the key of the abyss language closer to the keys of death and Hades as against the text of Revelation.

In another statement, Beale claims that "[t]he 'key of the abyss' in 20:1 is similar to the keys in chs. 1, 3, 6, and 9...".<sup>486</sup> However, Rev. 6 contains no reference whatsoever to the word key. In Rev. 6 at the opening of the fourth seal, the fourth horseman comes and death and Hades follow him. It can be argued that this shows Christ's authority to send death as a plague, but this image is different from that of Rev. 1:18, which emphasizes the power of Christ to release people from death, and no keys are mentioned at all.

In addition, the mere fact that two passages (Rev. 1:18 and Rev. 3:7-9) mention keys is insufficient evidence to suggest that both sets of keys are identical, especially since their function is different. In Rev. 1:18, the keys of death and Hades demonstrate Christ's power over death and resurrection and his ability to release people from the clutches of death.<sup>487</sup> In Rev. 3:7-9, Christ, who holds the key of David, is able to keep the door to salvation open for the Philadelphian Christians, even though the nominal Jews of Philadelphia attempt to exclude them.<sup>488</sup> It is unreasonable to equate these two keys because they open different doors; to resurrected life in Rev. 1:18, and to salvation in Rev. 3:8.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, Rev. 20 not only speaks of Satan's binding but also of his release. For consistency, the binding and release of Satan should be somehow parallel to each other or contrasting. If, as Beale claims, Satan is bound by virtue of Christ's

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<sup>484</sup> The seven stars of 1 En. 18:13 probably should not be identified with the watchers who are also identified as fallen stars in the Dream Visions. Black, *The Book of Enoch*, 160.

<sup>485</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984.

<sup>486</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 984.

<sup>487</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>488</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 187-88.

resurrection,<sup>489</sup> the unbinding of Satan would then suggest that somehow the power of the resurrection became quashed. This creates a major theological problem. There is no evidence from Revelation that the power of Christ's resurrection will diminish or even be temporally reversed at the eschaton. Beale explains the release of Satan as his ability to blind people "to the truth, but also and especially causing them to assemble together to annihilate the community of God's people on earth."<sup>490</sup> But this alludes to the consequences of the unbinding not an explanation of its nature. Thus, Beale explains the binding (spiritual binding due to the resurrection)<sup>491</sup> and its effect (restraining Satan's powers),<sup>492</sup> but does not explain the release, only the effects of that release.

The conclusion is that the amillennial proposition that understands the binding of Satan as a metaphor of his defeat at Christ's cross and the resurrection is unsatisfactory. The context is Satan's defeat at the hands of the Divine Warrior. There is no reason to diminish John's powerful language for the absolute imprisonment of Satan. The purpose of the metaphor is not to show a restraining of Satan's deceptions but rather to announce their complete cessation. This is also evident from John's explanation for the binding of Satan. John explains that Satan is bound so that he will not deceive the nations any longer, till the thousand years are fulfilled (...ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. Rev 20:3). Clearly Satan deceives no one during the millennium.<sup>493</sup> Beale and other scholars who adhere to amillennialism are trying to explain the binding of Satan as a restriction of his ability to harm the believers spiritually.<sup>494</sup> However, Rev. 20:3 specifically claims that Satan is bound so that he will not deceive the nations (τὰ ἔθνη), not the church. Since most references to the nations in Revelation are references to God's enemies, Beale's interpretation that here the nations somehow represent the church is completely unfounded.<sup>495</sup> The context confirms that Rev. 20:3 does not refer to the protection of the church but announces the cessation of Satan's deception against the nations. When his incarceration ceases and Satan becomes unbound in Rev. 20:7, he goes and deceives the nations, not the church. In fact, his deception is successful as the nations follow him once

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<sup>489</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985.

<sup>490</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1022.

<sup>491</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985.

<sup>492</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 986.

<sup>493</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 785.

<sup>494</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 985-86.

<sup>495</sup> Beatrice S. Neall, "Amillennialism Reconsidered," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 43, no. 1 (2005): 190.

more to battle in Rev. 20:8-9. Beale's amillennial interpretation, therefore, understands the binding of the nations in Rev. 20:3 as a reference to the protection of the church but the unbinding of Satan four verses later as opening the way for him to deceive actual nations. Such a flexible interpretation of terms does not do justice to the text of Revelation.

#### 5.4 Who are the nations of Rev. 20:8?

As we already saw, the conclusion that Satan is prevented from deceiving the nations in the aftermath of the war (Rev. 20:3) should be reconciled with our previous suggestion that the nations were utterly destroyed in the battle of Rev 19:11-21. Some scholars explain this discrepancy by claiming that the results of the battle are not as universal as the text suggests.<sup>496</sup> This view contradicts the unreserved statements of Rev. 19:11-21 that envision complete destruction for the wicked, as well as the underlying message of the book behind the symbolism that this battle is actually between the "people of the world" and Jesus.<sup>497</sup> Moreover, John's carrion-eating birds feasting on unburied corpses imagery, borrowed from the Ezekiel Gog oracles and modified not to include burials, further suggests that the earth is completely deserted.<sup>498</sup>

Others suggest that the armies Satan amasses in Rev. 20:8 are demonic beings.<sup>499</sup> In support of this interpretation is the ancient belief that the gates to the underworld were located at the four ends of the earth, which is precisely the location from where Satan recruits his armies.<sup>500</sup> However, this position is not viable either. Why would John call these demonic beings "nations" if in the immediate context of Rev. 21:24 beings by the same designation (nations) enter the new Jerusalem and their kings bring their glory to God?<sup>501</sup> Furthermore, demonic beings are naturally followers of Satan. It would be unnecessary for Satan to deceive them since they have always been on his side.<sup>502</sup>

Yet another interpretation understands the gathered armies of Satan in Rev 20:8 as the ghosts or disembodied spirits of those nations slain in the battle with the Divine Warrior in Rev.

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<sup>496</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 702; Caird, *The Revelation*, 251.

<sup>497</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107.

<sup>498</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>499</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107.

<sup>500</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107.

<sup>501</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 65.

<sup>502</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 65.

19:21.<sup>503</sup> The problem with this view is that nowhere in the text of Rev. 20 do we encounter the notion that the army of Satan consists of such beings. In fact, the notion of ghosts and demons joining forces to attack God's people is completely absent from the "Jewish and Christian eschatology of the day."<sup>504</sup> This view also assumes that Satan's prison (the abyss) is identical with the underworld which is the destination of the dead.<sup>505</sup> In Rev. 20:8, Satan gathers his armies from the four corners of the earth,<sup>506</sup> but this recruitment takes place at the end of the thousand years and John has already mentioned in Rev. 20:5 that at that time a resurrection takes place. During this resurrection, the spirit returns to the body (see Luke 8:55), so that the citing of a resurrection for the rest of the dead<sup>507</sup> in Rev. 20:5 excludes the possibility that this army is ghosts or disembodied spirits.

Because of the inadequacy of these positions, those who adhere to amillennialism discard the possibility that Rev. 20 describes events that follow the battle of Rev. 19:11-21 chronologically.<sup>508</sup> The reasoning is that if the nations are destroyed completely in Rev. 19:21, there seem to be no good candidates alive for Satan to deceive in Rev. 20:3 and therefore Satan's binding serves no apparent purpose.<sup>509</sup> Indeed, in order to explain this discrepancy the premillennialists who note it<sup>510</sup> argue that the result of the battle is not universal and some survive contrary to Rev. 19:21.<sup>511</sup> The amillennialists take seriously the language of Rev. 19:21, concluding that it describes the complete defeat and extermination of all of God's enemies. However, amillennialists believe that the events of Rev. 20 refer back to the salvation history and the binding of Satan took place when Jesus defeated him by His resurrection.<sup>512</sup> Since it is

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<sup>503</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35-36. Rissi's view includes together with the ghostly nations, demonic armies.

<sup>504</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 123.

<sup>505</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35. This view was refuted earlier; see also Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

<sup>506</sup> Citing Ps. 60:3 (LXX ref.) Rissi argues that the phrase "ἀπὸ τῶν περάτων τῆς γῆς" refers to the realm of the dead. Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35.

<sup>507</sup> The resurrection of Rev. 20:4 is that of the believers (καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη), described at Rev. 20:5b as the first resurrection. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 267-68. In the next verse (Rev. 20:5), another resurrection is described for the rest of the dead (οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν) presumably referring to that of the nations (see Rev. 20:8 where the nations re-enter the narrative of Revelation at the time of that resurrection). Rowland, *Revelation*, 708. These resurrections will be studied in greater detail later.

<sup>508</sup> Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 239.

<sup>509</sup> White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 321; Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 239.

<sup>510</sup> White laments that very few premillennial scholars have even noted this discrepancy. White, "Reexamining the Evidence," 323.

<sup>511</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 353; Osborne, *Revelation*, 702; Beasley-Murray, *The Revelation*, 283.

<sup>512</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 244.

evident that for John Satan is active and dwells in our world even after Christ's resurrection,<sup>513</sup> amillennialists take figuratively the language of Rev. 20:2-3 that describes the binding of Satan in terms that suggest he is completely immobilized in the abyss. In essence, both of these approaches base their position on one passage (either Rev. 19:21 or Rev. 20:2-3) at the expense of the other in the immediate context.

#### 5.4.1 A symbolic reading of Satan's binding

I submit that both of the aforementioned approaches make the same mistake by not taking both Rev. 19:21 and Rev. 20:2-3 seriously. In fact, only when both passages are studied together can we understand John's view because these passages complement and explain the other. As the previous chapter showed, the battle of Rev. 19:11-21 ends with the annihilation of all of God's enemies. None of the wicked nations survive the second coming of Christ. Their corpses become the food of carrion-eating birds. This image of desolation is not logically contrary to the binding of Satan, whose purpose is not to deceive the nations any longer; rather, it explains the nature of that binding. Satan is bound because he is disarmed. All his armies and all his subjects have been killed and in the new reality he finds himself in, he is unable to perform his most basic function which is deception. In fact, the Greek name for the devil used in Rev. 20:2 means to slander and to accuse falsely.<sup>514</sup> Without subjects to deceive Satan is unable to perform his most central task. As Tonstad observes "the 'binding' of Satan ... is better understood as people removed from his reach than as him being removed from a society that is otherwise flourishing."<sup>515</sup>

This proposal fits with our previous suggestion that Christ as the Divine Warrior binds the devil.<sup>516</sup> When the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:21 kills all the followers of Satan and casts his closest allies in the lake of fire, he renders Satan alone and thus unable to operate. The fact that the binding is absolute and is described with multiple active verbs (ἐκράτησεν, ἔδησεν, ἔβαλεν, ἔκλεισεν, ἐσφράγισεν, Rev. 20:2-3) only reinforces the complete destruction of Satan's human allies and subjects which John insisted on only a few verses before. This interpretation

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<sup>513</sup> See, for instance, Waymeyer, "The Binding," 45. Neall, "Amillennialism Reconsidered," 190. For example, Christ in his letter to the church in Pergamum claims that the church dwells where the throne of Satan is, and that Antipas, the faithful witness, was killed where Satan dwells (ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ, Rev. 2:13). Such a claim directly contradicts the notion that Satan is confined and bound in the abyss if both passages refer to the same time frame.

<sup>514</sup> LSJ, s.v. "διαβολή."

<sup>515</sup> Tonstad, *Revelation*, 292.

<sup>516</sup> See chapter 5.1.2.

also highlights the symbolic nature of the binding. Literally binding Satan with a metal chain would not be able to confine his operations since he is a spiritual being.<sup>517</sup>

The text of Revelation allows us to confirm this hypothesis. As was foretold in Rev. 20:3, Satan is released from his captivity in Rev. 20:7 at the end of the thousand years. This release is expressed by the passive *λυθήσεται*. The passive here is usually understood to be a divine passive sense that “God will release Satan from his prison”.<sup>518</sup> The theory proposed suggests that Satan is bound because his subjects and armies were killed by the Divine Warrior. Living alone in a desolate earth void of human beings, Satan is unable to deceive anyone and is left completely powerless to exert any influence. Satan’s release from that figurative prison must mean that the circumstances have changed and now he has subjects to deceive. Revelation indicates that indeed this is the case since according to Rev. 20:5 a resurrection takes place for the “rest of the dead” (*λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν*) at the end of the thousand years, which is precisely the timing of Satan’s release.<sup>519</sup> Mealy demonstrates that John “conspicuously plotted the release of Satan” from his confinement and the resurrection of the unrepentant to occur at the same time. The author of Revelation used the same phrase to point his readers in the right direction. Thus, John claims that Satan is imprisoned so that he would no longer deceive the nations *until the thousand years are fulfilled* (*ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη*, Rev. 20:3). Likewise, the identical phrase (*ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη*) in Rev. 20:5 informs the reader that the rest of the dead do not come to life *until the thousand years are fulfilled*.<sup>520</sup> The same phrase leads the reader to realize that these two events (the binding of Satan and the second resurrection) are inextricably connected. Thus, unlike the amillennial position that explains only the binding of Satan and avoids dealing with the significance of Satan’s release, this theory explains symbolically in contrasting terms both the binding and the release of Satan. Satan is bound at the beginning of the millennium right after his subjects are killed by the Divine Warrior, and he is released after the thousand years have been completed when his subjects come back to life.

But there is more in John’s language invoking the notion that Satan’s armies are the recently resurrected nations. John writes that Satan gathers his armies from the four corners of

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<sup>517</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 181; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 235.

<sup>518</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1093; Osborne, *Revelation*, 710.

<sup>519</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 124.

<sup>520</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 124-25. See also Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 65-66.



the earth (Rev. 20:8). According to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, it was a widespread belief in antiquity that the gates of the underworld were located at the four corners of the earth.<sup>521</sup> There are several stories in various mythologies, Babylonian and Greek, where a hero had to travel to the underworld. In these stories, the location of the entrance to the underworld is usually far away and downwards. There is, in other words, a horizontal and a vertical dimension to that trip.

In the horizontal dimension the hero travels far away from the lands of the living. According to the Epic of Gilgamesh, the land of the dead is located far away from the Babylonian communities.<sup>522</sup> Gilgamesh in his quest to find Utnapishtim (a righteous figure who corresponds to the biblical Noah), who dwelt in the underworld at the time of Gilgamesh, had to traverse “difficult mountains, ranged over all the lands, crossed all the seas—the seas of death—and the land of darkness.”<sup>523</sup>

The vertical dimension of the trip to the world where the dead dwell is best described in the poem of Inanna’s descent. This Sumerian myth relates that Inanna the queen of heaven descends to the nether world in order to meet her older sister and apparently bitter enemy Ereshkigal. The nether world is called the “great below” three times in the first three lines. The fourth line reads: “My lady abandoned heaven, abandoned earth, to the nether world she descended,”.<sup>524</sup> It is clear that the land of the dead was thought to be located below the earth.

Both of these dimensions are also found in the Greek myths of journeys into the underworld. Perhaps the most famous account is that of Odysseus meeting with the seer Teiresias who had already passed away. In order to reach the underworld, Odysseus needs first to cross Ocean which is envisioned as a great river encircling the earth, thought to be in the shape of a disc encircled by the Ocean.<sup>525</sup> The famous four rivers of the underworld come together there; Styx, Cocytos, Pyriphlegethon, and Acheron. At the point where the rivers meet was a rock sacred to Persephone. In this sacred spot, Odysseus performed a sacrifice. As the blood of the animals flowed into the trench, the souls of the dead begun to ascend from Erebus, the place of darkness, to the land of the living where Odysseus stood. Technically speaking,

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<sup>521</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107.

<sup>522</sup> Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds*, 1 edition (London: UCL Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>523</sup> Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell*, 4.

<sup>524</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd Revised ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 52.

<sup>525</sup> Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell*, 23.

Odysseus does not descend to Hades, and thus his meeting Teiresias perhaps should not be described as a katabasis (the term that describes the descent to the underworld). It is clear though from the context that the souls ascend so he will encounter them. The soul of Elpinor also specifically claims that when he died he descended to Hades.<sup>526</sup> Both dimensions, the horizontal (beyond the lands, to Oceanus) and the vertical (below), are present in the context of Odysseus's encounter with the souls of the underworld.

More importantly, these dimensions also seem to have been present in some Jewish writings. We do not have trips to the underworld in the Biblical writings but Hades/Sheol, the grave, was spoken of as being below the land of the living, thus demonstrating the vertical dimension of the underworld. For instance, Saul asks the witch of Endor to bring up (הָבִי אֲנָא גֵי מוֹי, 1 Sam. 28:8) the spirit of whom he will ask. Jesus's words in Matt. 11:23 also demonstrate how Hades was often spoken of in such vertical terms καὶ σύ, Καφαρναούμ, μὴ ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθήσῃ; ἕως ἄδου καταβήσῃ-(and you Capernaum, will you be raised to the heavens? [No] to Hades you will be brought down, Matt. 11:23).

Rissi also points out that there is evidence that the fringes of the earth refer to the realm of the dead.<sup>527</sup> For instance, in Ps 61:3 (v.2 in English versions) the Psalmist cries from the end of the earth (Ps. 61:3 עַל-סוּף הָאָרֶץ). We may understand that the Psalmist is exiled in a distant land and his heart is overwhelmed with problems, but it is also possible that the heart of the Psalmist is fainting (NIV and NRSV translate הָטַף ['ataph] as faint) as he is dying. In this case, the ends of the earth symbolize his passing to the grave.

Returning to Rev. 20:8, Satan gathers his forces from the four corners of the earth; its uttermost regions. This corresponds with the horizontal dimension of the gates of the underworld. If the battle with the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:11-21 was against the armies of the nations, then the survivors would continue to inhabit the earth, not only its corners. Yet Rev. 20:8 firmly locates the nations at the four corners of the earth (τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐν ταῖς τέσσαρσιν γωνίαις τῆς γῆς). Usually those who believe in nations surviving during the millennium envision the believers ruling them. However, the image that Revelation 20 evokes is not one of saints and nations living in close proximity while the nations are ruled by the saints. On the contrary,

<sup>526</sup> For example, after Elpinor describes his death he describes how his soul went down to Hades. ψυχὴ δ' Αἰδόσδε κατήλθε. Homer *Od.* 11.65.

<sup>527</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 35.

the saints and the nations are described in totally different locations and separated from each other after the end of the millennium.<sup>528</sup> It is more likely, therefore, that the act of Satan gathering his forces from the four corners of the earth signifies his recruiting as soldiers those who came back from the dead after the second resurrection.

The ascending course of Satan's forces is made explicit by using the phrase *ἀνέβησαν ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς γῆς* (*they ascended on the breadth of the earth*, [emphasis mine] Rev. 20:9). Aune suggests three overlapping ways this has been understood. First, he claims that people were always *going up* to Jerusalem, never down. This reflects the topographical location of Jerusalem, which was on a mountain.<sup>529</sup> In other words, Satan's forces went up towards Jerusalem. Similarly, the idiom "to go up" is used to describe the approach to Israel.<sup>530</sup> Last, the phrase to ascend is used of nations going up and mounting an attack against Jerusalem. In fact, the phrase "to go up" came to be a technical term for mounting an attack in the HB (e.g., Judg. 12:3; 1 Sam. 7:7; 2 Sam. 11:1; 1 Kgs. 20:1; Isa. 36:10).<sup>531</sup> Most modern scholars think that the latter is reflected in this passage.<sup>532</sup> The fact that the phrase to go up (*ἀναβήσῃ*) is also used in Ezek. 38:9, 16, the oracle against Gog that describes the same enemy with Rev. 20:8, seems to confirm this conclusion.

The problem with these interpretations is that John does not claim that the armies ascended to Jerusalem or to Israel or even simply against God's people. Satan's armies ascended "onto the breath of the earth" (Rev. 20:9). The phrase "they ascended" is a peculiar choice to describe "armies assembling for battle on a *plain*."<sup>533</sup> The notion that the Satanic armies ascended may have another significance. In this context, the ascent of the armies may primarily reflect their climbing from hades back onto the surface of the earth. Hades was the location where the dead were kept; the underworld.<sup>534</sup> The ascent of these armies may signify their resurrection.

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<sup>528</sup> Note that there is no evidence whatsoever from the text of Revelation that during the millennium saints and the wicked interact.

<sup>529</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1096.

<sup>530</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1096.

<sup>531</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1096.

<sup>532</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1026-27; Osborne, *Revelation*, 713; Koester, *Revelation*, 778.

<sup>533</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 136.

<sup>534</sup> Richard Bauckham, "Hades, Hell," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 3:14-15.

An objection to this argument may be that this interpretation suggests the nations are deceived in v. 8 before we are told of their resurrection in v. 9, if in fact their ascent signifies their resurrection. However, John does not appear to be very precise with the natural sequence of events, especially in this chapter. On two other occasions and in describing resurrection specifically, John mentions what the resurrected are doing before he reports their resurrection. So, in Rev. 20:4 John sees thrones and presumably the souls of the beheaded seated upon them, and *afterwards* explains that they came to life and reigned with Christ for 1000 years. Additionally, in v. 12 John sees the dead standing before God's throne, and the judgement of the dead according to what was written in the books before he describes their resurrection in v. 13, where the sea, death and hades gave up their dead. It is not therefore, strange for John to speak first of the deception and then of the resurrection of these armies.

Last, the phrase τὸ πλάτος τῆς γῆς also alludes to a resurrection. The phrase appears only once before in the LXX in Dan. 12:2.<sup>535</sup> The passage is perhaps the clearest example of resurrection in the HB: πολλοὶ τῶν καθευδόντων ἐν τῷ πλάτει τῆς γῆς ἀναστήσονται (many of those sleeping in the breadth of the earth will rise, Dan. 12:2). In Daniel, the breadth of the earth is where the dead are sleeping. In Revelation, the nations went up (ἀνέβησαν) onto the expanse of the earth. Despite the differing use of the term, the fact that John is alluding to a clear resurrection passage with a unique phrase suggests that he wanted to associate the ascent of the nations with the notion of the resurrection.

The hypothesis that Satan is bound symbolically because he has no one to deceive creates some questions concerning the location of his incarceration as well as the location of the dead whom Satan later deceives. Mealy assumes that both are imprisoned together, recalling Isa. 24:23.<sup>536</sup> However, it was previously noted that Hades and the abyss should not be thought of as identical locations. According to Revelation the dead are kept in Hades<sup>537</sup> whereas Satan was thrown into the abyss. Since Satan is not said to have been killed at the coming of the Divine Warrior, he could not be placed in Hades with the dead nations. Furthermore, if Satan

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<sup>535</sup> Without the article, the words also appear in Sir. 1:3 (ὑψος οὐρανοῦ καὶ πλάτος γῆς). This instance is not the same as either Daniel or Revelation.

<sup>536</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 124.

<sup>537</sup> This statement reflects the general understanding of Revelation that Hades is the place for the dead. Koester, *Revelation*, 246. In Rev. 19, the dead nations are not specifically mentioned as going to Hades although we are told that they are "given" back from death and Hades in Rev. 20:13. In Rev. 20:8, in the nations' first reappearance since their killing in Rev. 19:21, they also appear at the four corners of the earth, the doors of the underworld. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 107.

and the nations were confined together one could not argue that Satan was disarmed or bound because he would have all his subjects together with him. But where is the location of the abyss?

As was noted earlier, the abyss is a standard reference to the bottomless sea, a chaotic place away from God's order and creation, the dwelling place of demons. In Rev. 20, the abyss is a representation of the earth void of all life because of the coming of the Divine Warrior. According to Isa. 24, (a source that as we saw earlier has shaped John's understanding of the imprisonment of Satan),<sup>538</sup> the arrival of Yahweh leaves the earth desolate. Isaiah describes the earth as laid waste, withered, defiled, and destroyed as if by the flood, with its very foundations shaken (Isa. 24:1, 4, 5, 18-20). A similarly desolate image of the earth after the visitation of Yahweh was invoked by Jeremiah, who described the earth as formless and void, the mountains and the hills as shaking, and the land empty of its inhabitants and birds (Jer. 4:23-25).<sup>539</sup> Although Jeremiah lacks the notion of the imprisonment of demons, it does contain the idea of the visitation of Yahweh as well as his rapid advance like the clouds, his chariots and horses (Jer. 4:13). The visitation of the Divine Warrior, the clouds, and the horses are all ideas that John employs frequently in passages describing the second coming (cf. Rev. 1:7; 14:14-20; 19:11-21). The last background that we saw was from 1 Enoch's descriptions of the abyss as a place where fallen angels or stars were imprisoned.<sup>540</sup> That passage too made allusions to the prison of the angels as being in a primordial state and in fact used imagery and language from the creation. The common denominator of all these passages is that after the judgement of God, the earth or for 1 Enoch the location where the fallen stars were taken for captivity is left desolate in a primordial state.

John's scenario shares much with the Jewish eschatological expectation that the earth will return to a primordial state at the end and before God's eternal kingdom. The conclusion of the seven plagues brings the reader chronologically just prior to the second coming; the last plague is in fact the "final event before the eschaton."<sup>541</sup> The coming of Jesus is also inferred by the storm theophany accompanying the final plague. The earthquake, the hail and the disappearance of mountains and islands are events closely associated with Sinai, and the day of

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<sup>538</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 990-91; Koester, *Revelation*, 770; Osborne, *Revelation*, 700; Aune, *Revelation* 17-22, 1078; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 576.

<sup>539</sup> Stefanovic includes this passage as a background for Rev. 20. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 576.

<sup>540</sup> 1 En. 18:11-16 cf, 1 En. 21:7 and chapter 5.2.

<sup>541</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 601. Note also that the sixth plague ended with a clear allusion to the second coming by referring to the idea that Christ will come as a thief. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 300-301.

the Lord (Exod. 19:18-21; Ps. 97:5; Isa. 2:12-19; 40:4; 45:2; 1 En. 1:6-7; 4 Ezra 15:42;<sup>542</sup> T. Moses 10:4; Sib. Or. 8:232-238<sup>543</sup>).<sup>544</sup> The seventh plague is so devastating that “the creation trembles and flees from the presence of God coming in wrath to judgment”.<sup>545</sup> A catastrophic earthquake destroys the cities of the nations, the islands as well as the mountains. The magnitude of the earthquake is seen in its devastating effect in splitting Babylon into three parts and the cities of the nations falling (Rev. 16:19).<sup>546</sup> Beside the earthquake, huge hail weighing a talent falls upon the earth (Rev. 16:20). Even if the late Jewish definition of the weight of a talent is used, this hail would weigh at least 20.4 Kgs.<sup>547</sup> The point is that the hail is extremely large (much larger than anything encountered in real life) and it causes real devastation. The earthquake and the hail are in addition to the previous plagues that polluted the sea (Rev. 16:3), the rivers (Rev. 16:4), made the sun scorching (Rev. 16:8), and brought darkness (Rev. 16:10). As the plagues proceed, the earth becomes all the more uninhabitable and inhospitable to life. The coming of the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:11-21 then kills all the wicked. The events as described by John render the earth desolate and destroyed. Just as creation took place in seven days, at the end, seven plagues undo that work of creation. This is why it is imperative for the earth and the heavens to be re-created before they host the believers for eternity in Rev. 21:1. The text is an allusion to Isa. 65:17 where “the newness comes from God creating.”<sup>548</sup> The earth needs this re-creation because the desolation of the previous plagues and battles has left the earth in a primordial state.

The idea that before the final judgement the earth will return to a primordial state is also found in 4 Ezra 7:26-44. 4 Ezra is an apocalyptic work dated at about 100 AD, roughly the

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<sup>542</sup> However, 4 Ezra chs. 15 and 16 is probably not Jewish but a Christian addition to the book. Bruce M. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 518.

<sup>543</sup> The reference is also Christian and lines 217-250 are part of an acrostic poem that its initials spell out: Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Υἱός Σωτὴρ Στρατός. John J. Collins, “Sibylline Oracles,” in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 416.

<sup>544</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 599.

<sup>545</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 205.

<sup>546</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 598. Kiddle writes that “[t]he term the cities of the nations, give us the wide picture of universal ruin.” Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 332-33.

<sup>547</sup> Marvin A. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Other estimates place the weight of a talent between 60 and 100 pounds. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 304. Whatever the weight of the talent, John is not being literal. His point is that the hail of the last plague is so large that such a phenomenon has never occurred before and is utterly catastrophic and devastating on the earth.

<sup>548</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 794; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1116.

same time as Revelation.<sup>549</sup> The book suggests that the Messiah will rule for four hundred years (4 Ezra 7:28). Following his reign, the Messiah and all people will die and the world will return to *primaeval* silence for seven days (4 Ezra 7:30). These days having passed, a resurrection will occur, and the Most High will administer justice to all—righteous and unrighteous. The account of judgement in 4 Ezra differs somewhat from that of Rev. 20,<sup>550</sup> but it also shares a similar pattern.<sup>551</sup> Here it is sufficient to note that immediately after the earth became devoid of its inhabitants it was described as if in a primeval state.

The notion that locations that were previously inhabited by humans will become the dwelling places of demonic beings had already been announced in Rev. 18:2. There the angel who announces the destruction of Babylon declares that it has become: “a dwelling place (κατοικητήριον) of demons, a haunt (φυλακή) of every foul spirit, a haunt (φυλακή) of every foul bird, a haunt (φυλακή) of every foul and hateful beast” (NRSV). The English text obscures John’s repetition of the word φυλακή three times in the space of one verse. Since the word φυλακή means prison,<sup>552</sup> Rev. 18:2 also describes a demonic imprisonment like Rev. 20:1-3. Koester, who notes that φυλακή means prison, prefers to translate the word as an enclosed space and points to the fact that demons and unclean spirits were thought to inhabit desolate places and devastated cities.<sup>553</sup> All these observations are important. The word φυλακή connotes confinement and imprisonment and ties this text with Rev. 20:7, which describes the release of Satan, not from the abyss but from his prison (ἐκ τῆς φυλακῆς). Furthermore, the notion that desolate spaces are the home or prison of demons and spirits also fits with our proposal that the desolate earth is the abyss, the prison of Satan. Last, the unclean birds that feast on corpses also tie Rev. 18:2 with Rev. 19:17-21, where these birds are described as the sole survivors of the battle.<sup>554</sup> These observations show that the symbolism of Satan being thrown into the abyss does not denote his physical relocation to another subterranean locale. Satan’s being thrown into the abyss refers to his isolation on the destroyed, desolate earth.

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<sup>549</sup> Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” 520.

<sup>550</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1106.

<sup>551</sup> The pattern of 4 Ezra’s eschatology and its relation to Rev. 20 will be considered later in the discussion of the millennial kingdom. For the similarities, see Jack T. Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium? The Sources behind Revelation 20,” *New Testament Studies* 50, no. 3 (2004): 449.

<sup>552</sup> See, for instance, Matt. 5:25; 14:3, 10; 18:30; 25:36; Mark 6:17, 27; Acts 5:19.

<sup>553</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 697-98.

<sup>554</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 965.

This theory has direct implications for the question of the nations. In Rev. 19:11-21, the nations were destroyed by the coming of the Divine Warrior. We saw that the war was universal and that nobody survived the second coming. We also argued that Satan's imprisonment in the abyss during the thousand years is a reference to his isolation on the earth with nobody to deceive. This series of events does not allow for any possibility that the nations will repent. Indeed, Rev. 20 contains no such hint of repentance. One would have expected at least a statement from John on how the nations responded to God while beyond the influence of Satan, but Rev. 20 is completely silent on the matter. This is because the binding of Satan does not suggest an easier path to salvation for the nations, but is an image that assumes their absence from the earth.

All these observations pertain to the fate of the nations, but what happens to the saints during the millennium? Although their fate is not the subject of this study, the destiny of the church and that of the nations is intertwined, which makes it crucial to trace the fate of the church in Rev. 20 as well. The process is important because any hypothesis we may formulate on the nations will have to be consistent with Revelation's greater scheme of events.



## 6. The Saints during the millennium

Whereas Satan is bound in the abyss for a thousand years, the saints enjoy a much better time serving as priests of God and reigning with Christ for the same duration—a thousand years.<sup>555</sup> Thus, the contrasting image of the fate of the saints with that of the wicked in Rev. 19:17-21 and that of Satan in Rev. 20:1-3 continues. The reign of the saints, described in Rev. 20:4-6, is usually referred to as an *interim reign* because John later portrays the eternal reign of the saints on earth after the millennium has ended.

In the previous chapters, we reached some conclusions concerning the fate of the saints and the wicked that will be relevant in this chapter. We noted in chapter 4 that, during the second coming, the saints were transferred to heaven. Examining the fate of the wicked nations in Rev. 19, we found that they were killed at the same event. The last image of the earth in Rev. 19 is becoming a vast battlefield full of unburied corpses that feeds the carrion-eating birds. Rev. 20 continued the same image. We concluded that the description of Satan's binding and his subsequent being cast into the abyss essentially illustrated his confinement to the desolate, chaotic earth. Alone, on a deserted earth that became his prison, Satan was rendered completely unable to deceive anyone. The image of the abyss in Rev. 20 is remarkably similar to that of the desolate Babylon in Rev. 18 which also became a demonic prison and the home of unclean birds.

It is important to test these conclusions in the light of the rest of Rev. 20. Does the earth remain uninhabited during all these years or does it become the location of the messianic reign? If the saints are somehow relocated back to earth, the earth itself clearly can hardly be the abyss where Satan is imprisoned. Another question has to do with the function of this interim kingdom. Why does John envision the salvation of the saints delivered in two separate instalments? These questions primarily concern the saints in Revelation but, as noted earlier, the fate of the saints is intertwined with that of the nations, and is often portrayed in contrasting terms. In this chapter, we will trace the traditions that may lie behind John's interim kingdom.

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<sup>555</sup> At first sight Rev. 20:4-6 appears to be speaking only about the martyrs. John's syntax, however, is not clear as to whom the passage may be referring. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084. Some of the candidates for seating on the thrones of Rev. 20:4 are the twenty-four elders (who are seated on thrones in Rev. 4:4; 11:16), angels or all the saints, and the martyrs in particular. The passage may be translated as "And I saw thrones and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them, even/also (I saw) the souls of those beheaded for the testimony of Jesus ...". The beheaded souls may be an additional group or a subgroup to the first one that John said occupied the thrones. It will be argued later that the broader context of Revelation as well as the immediate context of the millennium suggests that John expected all saints to be part of the millennial reign, so Koester, *Revelation*, 771; Wall, *Revelation*, 238. See chapter 7.1.

After evaluating them a new view will be proposed concerning the function of the interim kingdom in the eschatology of Revelation. The events occurring during the millennium further support the conclusion that John's narrative does not allow for a hypothetical conversion of the nations at that time. Rather, John's emphasis turns to heaven and the saints and does not deal with the nations until after the thousand years have been completed.

## 6.1 Why a thousand years?

In Rev. 20, John seems to be introducing a concept not found elsewhere in the Bible—the notion of an interim kingdom during which the saints will reign together with Christ for 1000 years.<sup>556</sup> Neither the time frame of a 1000 years reign nor the idea that the saints will inherit their salvation in two instalments is attested in the HB or elsewhere in the New Testament. The millennium has puzzled interpreters not least because John nearly always mines his themes for his writings from these quarries. Where does the concept of the millennium come from and why has John introduced this seemingly new notion here?

### 6.1.1 The interim messianic kingdom in Jewish literature.

Most commentators note that in some Jewish noncanonical apocalypses roughly contemporary with Revelation, and some rabbinic sources, the notion of an interim messianic kingdom occurs. For example, 4 Ezra 7:28 claims that the Messiah will be revealed and will remain for four hundred years before his death and the return of the world “to primeval silence for seven days”.<sup>557</sup> After that, the resurrection will occur and then a judgement. 4 Ezra 7:26-44 follows the same pattern as Rev. 20, describing an interim period during which the Messiah will reign. This period will be followed by a final resurrection and judgement.<sup>558</sup> The passage however has some notable differences from Revelation. First, the reigning period is not a thousand but four hundred years. Second, the passage says nothing of the Messiah's role as a warrior and judge.<sup>559</sup> Third, after the resurrection, the Messiah plays no part in the new eternal kingdom.<sup>560</sup> Last, in Revelation the reign of the saints does not end when the thousand years are over but continues

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<sup>556</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 234.

<sup>557</sup> Scholars usually date 4 Ezra around 100 AD. Metzger, “The Fourth Book of Ezra,” 520. All quotations from 4 Ezra are from Metzger's translation.

<sup>558</sup> Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium?,” 449.

<sup>559</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1106.

<sup>560</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1106.

seamlessly in the New Jerusalem where the saints will continue reigning for eternity (Rev. 22:5).<sup>561</sup>

The 2 Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Bar.), another Jewish apocalyptic work written roughly contemporaneously with Revelation, describes an interim messianic kingdom.<sup>562</sup> 2 Bar. 39:3-5 uses a *vaticinia ex eventu* to predict the succession of four kingdoms from the time of the implied author (Baruch the scribe) to the time of the actual author, who attempted to make theological sense of the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>563</sup> The four kingdoms are apparently Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome.<sup>564</sup> Baruch predicted that the Anointed would destroy the host of the last ruler who would be left alive but bound (2 Bar.40:1 cf. Rev. 19:11-21; 20:2-3). On mount Zion, the Anointed will convict this ruler of his evil deeds and then will kill him (2 Bar. 40:2). Although the dominion of the Anointed is said to “last forever” it actually appears to be of limited unspecified duration, “until the world of corruption has ended” (2 Bar. 40:3).<sup>565</sup> The reign of the Anointed therefore belongs to this age rather than to the age to come.<sup>566</sup> The messianic reign is not described in much detail in this chapter. Baruch simply claims that the Anointed will “protect the rest of my people” (2 Bar. 40:2). Later, 2 Bar. 72:1-74:4 provides more details about the conditions during the reign of the messiah, but that second passage does not explicitly describe his reign as interim.<sup>567</sup>

The binding and the killing of the last ruler are certainly reminiscent of the narrative of Rev. 20, although a notable difference is that the evil ruler of 2 Bar. 40:1-2 is human, not the devil as in Rev. 20:2, 10. Further, the resurrection is not mentioned in connection with this interim messianic kingdom. Baruch deals with the resurrection in 2 Bar. 30; 50. The timing is after the glorious return of the Anointed one (2 Bar. 30:1) and the context of the chapter is the

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<sup>561</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 787.

<sup>562</sup> 2 Baruch is often thought of as written around 100 AD like 4 Ezra. Since 2 Baruch appears to show a more advanced stage of theological development than 4 Ezra, it is generally thought of as slightly later. A. F. J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 617. All quotations from 2 Bar. are from Klijn’s translation.

<sup>563</sup> Giantzklidis, “The Heavenly Temple in Noncanonical Apocalyptic Literature,” 291. See also John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, Revised (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 195.

<sup>564</sup> George Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 280.

<sup>565</sup> Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” 633.

<sup>566</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 219.

<sup>567</sup> Aune sees an indication in 2 Bar. 74:2: “For that time is the end of that which is corruptible and the beginning of that which is incorruptible.” Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1107. The description portrays the kingdom as peaceful, without pain, strife, tribulation, or untimely deaths. Even manual work will be easy (2 Bar. 73:2-74:1).

resurrection of the righteous. However, the resurrection of the dead and their subsequent judgement does not appear in the same context as the interim kingdom.

Two other works that are often cited as examples of an intermediary messianic kingdom are 2 En. 32:2-33:1 and Jub. 1:27-9 and Jub. 23:26-31. These examples, however, are irrelevant to our understanding of Revelation's interim kingdom. Aune observes that 2 Enoch is a very late work, probably originating in the late Middle Ages, and Jub. 1:27-9 does not refer "to a temporary kingdom but to the eternal rule of God on earth with no mention of a Messiah."<sup>568</sup> Likewise, the period of a thousand years in Jub. 23:27 is a reference to the new life expectancy of the righteous during the eternal rule of God on earth.<sup>569</sup>

Later rabbinic literature assigned a variety of opinions concerning the duration of the messianic kingdom to particular rabbis. Strack and Billerbeck, III 826 composed a long list of rabbis who speculated on the duration of the kingdom. M. Ford summarizes the list as follows:

Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (AD 90) suggested a thousand years.

Joshua (AD 90), two thousand years.

Eleazar ben Azariah (AD 100) seventy years.

Akiba (AD 135), forty years.

Jose of Galilee (AD 110), sixty years.

Dasa (AD 180), six hundred years.

Eliezer ben Jose of Galilee (AD 150), four hundred years.

A number of Rabbis about AD 90 said two thousand years.<sup>570</sup>

The dates of the rabbinic sources should be taken with great caution since we cannot always be certain that the ideas attributed to a particular rabbi were indeed his and have not been redacted. The dates beside their names should often be considered to be much later.<sup>571</sup> Although these sources do not agree on the duration or even the descriptions of this interim

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<sup>568</sup> Aune, 1105. On dating 2 Enoch see also F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 94-95. Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 107-8. Contra Ford who suggests 50 AD as a date for 2 Enoch. Ford, *Revelation*, 352-53. Ford's dating for 2 Enoch has not been well received and "must be considered merely a *tour de force*." Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 449.

<sup>569</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1105; Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 449.

<sup>570</sup> J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation* (London: Anchor Yale Bible, 1975). 353.

<sup>571</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1108.

kingdom, they agree that there would be a limited intermediate period between the present age and the age to come. However, their late date makes them unlikely candidates for John's source; thus Aune concludes that "John is the first author who anticipates a messianic interregnum of one thousand years, a number symbolic for a lengthy yet limited period of time."<sup>572</sup>

In their quest to find an answer to the question of why John picks the period of a *thousand years*, some scholars turn to Ps. 90:4: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (NRSV). Roloff, for instance, considers it likely that John combined Ps. 90:4 with Gen. 1:31 and Gen. 2:1-3 to append to the present age of 6,000 years a seventh millennial day that would complete the week and represent the believer's sabbath rest.<sup>573</sup> The problem with this theory is that Roloff supports it by citing 2 En. 33:1ff, a work that as we noted earlier may be about a thousand years later than Revelation.<sup>574</sup> Roloff also brings up the epistle of Barnabas 16:4, which is roughly contemporary with Revelation and claims that in "six thousand years the Lord completed everything, because for Him a day means a thousand years." Barnabas understands the seventh day to refer to the coming of the "Son to abolish the time of the lawless and judge the impious...then deservedly (καλῶς) he will rest on the seventh day" (Bar. 16:5). However, nowhere does Barnabas connect "this notion of 6,000 years from creation to the end with the idea of a millennial messianic interregnum at the end time."<sup>575</sup> Moreover, A. Collins concludes that "nothing in the text of Revelation suggests that speculation on a world-week had anything to do with defining the time of Satan's confinement and of the messianic reign as a thousand years."<sup>576</sup>

### 6.1.2 The question of Zoroastrian influence on Revelation's eschatology.

In their search for the origin of Revelation's millennium, some scholars turn to influences from other religions, Zoroastrianism in particular. The equivalent to the Hebrew Messiah is Sōšyant, a saviour born of the seed of the great prophet Zarathuštra (Zoroaster) who will come to "establish the true faith and God's own nation."<sup>577</sup> It was believed that the seed of Zarathuštra

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<sup>572</sup> Aune, *Revelation* 17-22, 1108.

<sup>573</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 226.

<sup>574</sup> See footnote #568.

<sup>575</sup> Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 451.

<sup>576</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 85.

<sup>577</sup> John R. Hinnels, "Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament," *Numen* 16, no. 3 (1969): 163.

was to be preserved in a lake and towards the end of the world it would impregnate three virgins who would bathe there. The result would be the birth of three brothers, the third of which is the supreme Sōšyant Asvat-ereta. He would restore the world,<sup>578</sup> resurrect the dead,<sup>579</sup> and judge all men.<sup>580</sup> In the Greater Bundahišn, the longer recension of Zoroastrian cosmology and cosmogony, the final 3000 years of world history are divided into three periods of 1000 years each.<sup>581</sup> The sons of Zarathuštra are born at the end of each of these periods, restoring good in the world and reviving the Zoroastrian teachings that fell into neglect.<sup>582</sup> Sōšyant Asvat-ereta is born at the concluding millennium.<sup>583</sup> The great snake demon Aži Dahaka who was chained will also be set free at the beginning of the final millennium only to be defeated in the last battle.<sup>584</sup>

Zoroastrianism offers many parallels to Revelation's eschatology, including the notion of a demonic imprisonment and his release (albeit at a different time), the themes of a saviour, resurrection, judgement, restoration and the period of 1000 years. However, there are scholars who consider the theories of influence overblown. The first problem is the timing of most of these sources. It is difficult to identify with certainty the Zoroastrian teaching of the pre-Christian period. Some of the older primary sources are the Gathas, Zoroaster's own hymns, and the Zoroastrian scriptures, the Avesta (that include the Gathas). However, the preserved Gathas are so difficult to understand that scholars admit that in order to discern their proper meaning they have to seek the help of the later Zoroastrian scriptures.<sup>585</sup> The Avesta are also problematic. Iranian priests transmitted these texts orally because they rejected the use of writing until the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>586</sup> When they finally were written down in a text corpus, they were substantially reduced in size because of the Muslim conquests.<sup>587</sup> Nearly three quarters of

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<sup>578</sup> Yt. 19:89 ff.

<sup>579</sup> Yt. 13:128 f.

<sup>580</sup> Ir. Bd. 34:25 Hinnels, "Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament," 166-69.

<sup>581</sup> The age of the cosmos according to Zoroastrianism is supposed to be 12,000 years divided into four stretches of 3,000 years. Ninian Smart, *The World's Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 220. There were, however, dissenting opinions on this chronological division. The Zurvanite sect preferred a 6,000 year period followed by a Great Year of 1,000 years. Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 451.

<sup>582</sup> Norman Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 103.

<sup>583</sup> Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 452.

<sup>584</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 226; Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 452. Sanders explains that this demon was originally thought to have been slain previously, but later the "notion arose that he was only fettered."

<sup>585</sup> Charles David Isbell, "Zoroastrianism and Biblical Religion," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2006): 152.

<sup>586</sup> Isbell, "Zoroastrianism and Biblical Religion," 152.

<sup>587</sup> Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *An Introduction to Zoroastrianism*, 2005, 5.

the original Avesta is lost. For the reconstruction, scholars turn to later Pahlavi texts. These are Zoroastrian books written in Middle Persian and their final redaction was completed around the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>588</sup> The use of such texts to suggest influence on Judaism and Revelation is very precarious. In response, those who subscribe to the Zoroastrian influence, point out that behind the Pahlavi texts lie much earlier sources.<sup>589</sup> They draw attention to the fact that names and titles appearing in later Zoroastrian works must have been formed prior to the time of these writings “because they reflect earlier usage.”<sup>590</sup> The claim that although the concept of an eschatological millennium is attested only late, it “arises in the context of a long tradition of speculation about the different 1000 year periods of world history.”<sup>591</sup>

Sanders’ and Hinnells’ observations are correct in pointing out that the sources of the texts are important. However, much of the source material being earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD does not prove that it is earlier than the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD or that it influenced John.

James Barr argues against Zoroastrian influence on Jewish apocalyptic, and by extension on the millennium of Rev. 20. Barr bases his conclusions on two points. First, he finds no interest in Zoroastrian religion in Jewish literature, and second, Judaism does not adopt the structure of the Iranian religion.<sup>592</sup> Likewise, Hanson, who traces the development of Jewish apocalyptic literature, finds no evidence of outside foreign influences, concluding that it follows an “unbroken development” without the signs of outside influence that appear to be late, and after the essential character of Jewish apocalyptic was developed.<sup>593</sup>

It is difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion when the evidence is scant and can be interpreted in different ways. Instead of speaking generally of Zoroastrian influence on Judeo-Christian eschatology, it may be more helpful to discuss individual notions relevant to our discussion such as the 1000 years—a number that is attested only rarely in the Bible, or the interim messianic kingdom that, as noted earlier, appears only in two Jewish apocalypses.

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<sup>588</sup> Hinnells, “Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament,” 163; Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London: Routledge, 2002), 47. Bauckham pushes the date even further forward to the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, cautioning that it has undergone a number of redactions. Richard Bauckham, “Descent to the Underworld,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 2:145-149.

<sup>589</sup> Hinnells, “Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament,” 163.

<sup>590</sup> Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium?,” 454.

<sup>591</sup> Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium?,” 454.

<sup>592</sup> James Barr, “The Question of Religious Influence: The Case of Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 2 (1985): 201-35.

<sup>593</sup> Paul Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 8.

The thousand-year period is found only in Ps. 90:4 and, as was argued above, this passage is not a good candidate background for the millennium. Sanders concludes that since the Zoroastrian concepts appearing in the late surviving texts are older and more fitting to Rev. 20, they underlie Revelation's imagery and not Ps. 90.<sup>594</sup> But this argument presents the interpreter with a false dichotomy and asks him or her to select the most likely option from two, assuming that only two are available. As noted earlier, the thousand-year period is attested in the Zoroastrian religion but only as one period within three separate thousand-year schemes.<sup>595</sup> In Revelation, the thousand years are not related to any other time period. This suggests that the Zoroastrian background is not a suitable candidate for the thousand years in Revelation. Is there any possibility that John takes the notion of the 1000-year scheme from elsewhere?

Adela Yarbro Collins discusses the significance of numbers in Revelation, observing that they have far more prominence than in any other apocalyptic book.<sup>596</sup> As against Sanders, who thinks that the number 1000 is not a particularly Jewish unit such as 40 or 400,<sup>597</sup> she notes that other Jewish apocalypses such as *The Apocalypse of Weeks*, *The Book of Watchers* and the *Assumption of Moses* (otherwise called the *Testament of Moses*) used the number ten or multiples of ten to organize "large blocks of time in some meaningful way". The presumed purpose is seeking to demonstrate some sort of "orderliness and rationality in world history."<sup>598</sup> The issue, therefore, is not that the number 1000 is not present in Jewish works but rather that multiples of 10 are.

Resseguie points out that for John the number ten represents totality. Just as a complete human being has ten fingers and ten toes, the dragon and the beast have ten horns, and the beast has ten diadems on his horns (Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7). Ten kings ally with the beast at first and fight the Lamb, only to turn against Babylon and hate her later (Rev. 17:12, 16). The number is not only associated with the wicked forces. Ten are also the days of affliction of the Smyrna church.<sup>599</sup> Multiples of ten represent an amplification of the total number. The thousand years are the third power of ten ( $10^3$ ). In a way it is the product of the numbers 3 and 10. Whereas 10

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<sup>594</sup> Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 455.

<sup>595</sup> Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*, 103.

<sup>596</sup> Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 118.

<sup>597</sup> Sanders, "Whence the First Millennium?," 450.

<sup>598</sup> Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, 83.

<sup>599</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 31. Mathewson essentially argues for this interpretation when he suggests that the number 10 represents completeness. Mathewson, "A Re-Examination of the Millennium," 247.



represents totality, 3 is the number associated with the divine and the counterfeit divine.<sup>600</sup> The number three adds “superlative force.”<sup>601</sup> The thousand-year scheme, therefore, not only describes totality but is also amplified by the number three, which is associated with divinity and eternity. There is no need to postulate that John ventured outside the boundaries of the Judeo-Christian theology to come up with the number 1000. The number ten is a number that John has used often. This number was modified, intensified and transformed by the number three. Transforming important numbers or using multiples of these numbers is one of John’s common practices.<sup>602</sup> It is more likely, therefore, that the number 1000 is the product of John’s speculation with numerical values than a loan from the Zoroastrian religion.

The notion of an interim kingdom is also unlikely to have come from the Zoroastrianism. To be sure, these two religions share similar notions like a saviour, fighting and defeating demonic hosts, resurrecting the dead, and carrying out an eschatological judgement.<sup>603</sup> However, many religions have similar themes and how likely is it that John was influenced by the Zoroastrian religion to employ these themes in Revelation?

In conclusion, I do not find the Zoroastrian influence in the construction of Rev. 20 likely. The Iranian sources are far too recent for us to be able to use them with confidence and the period of a thousand years may have its roots in Jewish numerical speculation, not in the Zoroastrian periodization of history.

## 6.2 The theological function of the millennium

We seek to understand the roots of themes and identify the cultures that influenced their creation so that we appreciate their meaning and function better in the narrative of Revelation. Aune’s question: “What is the function of such a temporary messianic kingdom?”<sup>604</sup> is more important than “from where does John derive his image?” The assumption seems to be that this messianic kingdom reflects some sort of Jewish expectation. In fact, Barclay claims that the “whole background is Jewish and not Christian.”<sup>605</sup> As we noted earlier, Jewish apocalyptic writers

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<sup>600</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 28.

<sup>601</sup> Resseguie observes how in Rev. 4:8 the triple pronouncement of the four living creatures that God is holy “emphasizes God’s exceeding holiness.” Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 28.

<sup>602</sup> See how John uses the number twelve (Rev. 12:1; 21:12), one hundred and forty-four (12x12, Rev. 21:17), twelve thousand (12x1000, Rev. 12:5ff) and one hundred forty-four thousand (12x12x1000, Rev. 7:4).

<sup>603</sup> Sanders, “Whence the First Millennium?,” 447.

<sup>604</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1108.

<sup>605</sup> Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2:191.

such as 2 Bar. and 4 Ezra, who are roughly contemporary with John as well as some later rabbinic sources, envision such a kingdom. This suggests that during the time John wrote Revelation, ideas of an interim kingdom were part of the Jewish milieu. However, it can hardly be argued that John copied these ideas from these particular authors or that his interim kingdom functions the same way as the interim kingdoms of 2 Bar. and 4 Ezra because of the substantial differences that Revelation has from those works.

Others such as Roloff claim that the notion of the millennium “arose through the coalescence of two views ... [t]he older Davidic Messiah tradition expects in the future a saving consummation on earth ... [t]he later hope which was shaped in apocalyptic thought, awaits in the future the collapse of the present age and the dawn of the new age.”<sup>606</sup> Osborne admits that the “Old Testament had little explicit commentary on the ‘millennium’” but still believes that “... the view of the coming kingdom of God as an earthly reign ... provided the background for the concept” of Revelation’s millennium. Osborne then suggests that the rabbinic views of an interim kingdom modified this view.<sup>607</sup> Both scholars suggest that John merged two views (apocalyptic and classical prophecy according to Roloff, prophetic expectations modified by the rabbinic idea of the interim kingdom according to Osborne), but neither of them trace any Christian influence on the millennium.

Aune’s approach is more nuanced. He recognizes similarities of John’s interim kingdom, especially with that of 4 Ezra, but proposes that the two authors attempted to reconcile messianic expectations of an earthly kingdom with the concept of the ultimate future eternal reign of God independently of each other. Since the Jewish messiah was not a divine being, his possible death was not a problem for Ezra’s audience. On the other hand, for a Christian author like John, the death of the exalted Christ was not an option. According to Aune, therefore, it would be necessary for this earthly kingdom of Christ to transfer sovereignty to God. Aune finds evidence of this awkward transfer in John’s narration of two wars (Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:7-10); two victories over Satan (Rev. 20:1-3 and Rev. 20:10), two resurrections (Rev. 20:4-6 and Rev. 20:12-13), two judgements (Rev. 20:4 and Rev. 20:12-13) and finally two states of blessedness (Rev. 20:4 and Rev. 20:12). The purpose of this interim kingdom was to somehow pass the eternal theocratic rule from the messiah to God. Thus, the kingdom would

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<sup>606</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 224.

<sup>607</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 696.

function as “an anticipation of the perfect and eternal theocratic state that will exist when primordial conditions are reinstated for ever.”<sup>608</sup>

A different approach to the function of the millennium comes from D. Mathewson who adheres to the amillennial view.<sup>609</sup> Mathewson does not resort to Jewish prophecy or apocalyptic writings in order to understand the function of the millennium. Instead, he begins with the number 1000. He understands the number not only to represent completeness and totality but also as a contrast to the short period of ten days the church is to suffer in Rev. 2:10. Whereas the church’s suffering is to be short-lived, the vindication of the saints would be for a thousand years.<sup>610</sup> For Mathewson, the thousand years metaphorically portray the complete victory and vindication of the saints during the second coming of Christ. The millennium<sup>611</sup> reverses Satan’s and the beast’s attacks on the church and portrays the transfer of authority to the saints, their vindication and their authority to judge the wicked.<sup>612</sup>

In Mathewson’s amillennial understanding, the millennial kingdom is not a temporary reign before the final instalment of the eternal, unending reign of God, but the consummate triumph and vindication of the saints, the inauguration of God’s reign. The problem with this is that John not only repeatedly describes the temporal dimension of the millennium (χίλια ἔτη, Rev. 20: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7), but also speaks of the saints’ reign as an event that takes place *throughout* the thousand years. For instance, John could say that at the millennium God made the saints a kingdom (as in Rev. 1:6, ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν), thus emphasizing the inauguration or the reception of the kingdom rather than a continuous reign. However, John writes that the saints “reigned” and “will reign” (ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη ... βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη, Rev. 20:4, 6), both expressions that deal with the process of reigning not its inauguration or consummation.

Aune’s view has some merit, since it provides a plausible explanation for the duplication of many events that take place in Rev. 19-20. Aune’s theory also presupposes that the presence of the interim kingdom may not be entirely due to Jewish expectations but may have something to do with John’s Christian background. The biggest obstacle in adopting this view is that it

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<sup>608</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1108.

<sup>609</sup> Mathewson’s position is different to that of most amillennialists in that he believes Rev. 20:1-6 takes place after the second coming of Christ (most amillennialists view that time as the church age before the second coming) and yet still understands the two battles of Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:7-12 as recapitulating each other. Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 248.

<sup>610</sup> Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 247.

<sup>611</sup> Mathewson does not understand the millennium to be a temporal reference.

<sup>612</sup> Mathewson, “A Re-Examination of the Millennium,” 250.

offers no evidence for its main tenet. Aune claims that John constructed the millennium in order to facilitate the transition of “sovereignty from Christ to God”<sup>613</sup> but nowhere does he demonstrate that such a transfer took place from the text of Revelation. Revelation does not record a heavenly council like that of Dan. 7:13-14 at the end of the millennium at which Jesus surrenders the kingdom to God.<sup>614</sup> Aune cites 1 Cor. 15:24-28 where Paul mentions such a transfer. However, Paul’s eschatological scenario cannot be used to explain John’s. Unlike in Paul in Revelation, the reign of Christ does not end after the millennium but takes place simultaneously with that of God (Rev. 21:22; 23; 22:3).

The other views that were presented on the millennium assume a kingdom with an inherently Jewish character. Whether Jewish apocalyptic or classical prophetic expectations modified by rabbinic teachings, all these theories suppose that the millennial kingdom serves some Jewish prophetic/apocalyptic role. However, a close look at John’s description of the millennial reign in Rev. 20 shows that it bears no substantial resemblance to the HB’s expectations of a messianic reign. On the contrary, during the description of the millennial reign one can trace mostly ideas held by early Christian writers, although admittedly the theme of an interim thousand-year reign with Christ is not found in the New Testament. While most scholars assume the millennial kingdom to be the first instalment of the HB’s messianic kingdom, the description of this kingdom lacks nearly all the characteristics the messianic kingdom was supposed to have in the HB.<sup>615</sup>

### 6.3 The character of the millennial kingdom

According to the HB, God’s future kingdom was to be earthly, often with the Messiah as its leader.<sup>616</sup> People would live in a peaceful paradisaal setting with no wars (Isa. 2:4; Mic. 4:3). Even predatory animals would live in harmony with domestic ones and cause no harm (Isa. 65:25). The inhabitants of this kingdom would build houses and eat the fruit of their land (Isa. 65:20-21; Mic. 4:4). Central to these expectations is the city of Jerusalem in which the temple would be established and made more glorious (Isa. 60:13). The nations would stream into

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<sup>613</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1108.

<sup>614</sup> The reverse takes place in Dan. 7:13-14. The Son of Man is actually given dominion by the Ancient of Days; he does not surrender his sovereignty.

<sup>615</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 37-38. See also Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 183-84.

<sup>616</sup> According to Russel “the Messiah and the messianic concept are not always or necessarily found together”. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 285.

Jerusalem and be led by its light.<sup>617</sup> Other traditions expected the nations to be destroyed or to become subservient to Israel.<sup>618</sup> Since the new kingdom was to be founded by God, it was expected to be pure and righteous.<sup>619</sup> The messianic reign was to take place on earth. Most of these expectations revolved around Jerusalem, Israel and its relationship with the nations. The character, description and location of John's millennial kingdom is far from the Jewish expectations of the messianic reign.

On the other hand, when one analyses what John says about the locale, and what takes place during the millennial reign of the saints, it becomes clear that Christian, not Jewish expectations about the end are met. It is notoriously difficult to differentiate between early Christianity and Judaism since Christianity began as a Jewish offshoot that utilized Jewish scriptures and worshipped in the same place as its mother religion. However, early Christianity, especially because of its unique understanding of Jesus and his teachings developed an eschatology and beliefs that were either on the fringes of Judaism or in some cases simply non-existent. I propose that the millennial kingdom as described in Revelation is not based on Jewish apocalyptic or prophetic expectations for the end, but rather that it fulfils the hopes and expectations of early Christians. I suggest that John inserted the messianic kingdom in his eschatological order of events not to describe the transfer of sovereignty from Christ to God, as Aune supposes, but rather to allow for the fulfilment of both Christian and Jewish expectations, some of which were otherwise incompatible with each other. Christian expectations of the eschaton are being fulfilled during the millennium. In contrast, during the new earth, when the eternal rule of God and Jesus is described the Jewish prophetic expectations find their fulfilment. In order to verify this proposal, we will examine the character of the millennial kingdom and that of God's eternal kingdom on the new earth separately.

### 6.3.1 Reigning with Christ

John's depiction of the millennial reign is void of any HB concepts concerning the messianic kingdom. Christ the messiah reigns in this kingdom (Rev. 20:4, 6), but he does so *together* with his saints. In fact, the description of the millennium pays more attention to the reign of the saints than that of Christ since Christ's throne is not mentioned at all, whereas the thrones of the saints

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<sup>617</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 183.

<sup>618</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1985), 214.

<sup>619</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 290.

are specified in v.4.<sup>620</sup> The idea that the saints are coregents with the messiah is foreign to Jewish expectations. Two of the most famous passages describing the return of the Davidic rule are Jer. 23:5f and Isa. 9:7.<sup>621</sup> Neither passage assumes any sharing of power between the Davidic ruler and his subjects. The idea of saints reigning together with the Messiah also appears to be absent from Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>622</sup>

On the other hand, the notion of Christ reigning with his people is attested in early Christian texts. 2 Tim. 2:12 promises that those who endure will reign with Christ: “if we endure, we will also reign with him [συμβασιλεύσομεν]; if we deny him, he will also deny us” (NRSV). Reigning with Christ is common to Revelation, Rev. 5:10 predicting the saints’ reign as does Rev. 22:5, which declares the everlasting reign of the saints.

### 6.3.2 Judging during the millennium

The main function of the saints during the millennium is judging. According to HB expectations, God is the judge who will bring the nations to judgement (Jer. 25:31). The Davidic king will also judge the earth with wisdom and understanding and justice (Isa. 11:1-4). However, judgement by the saints is not found in the HB. In later Jewish apocalyptic works, God sometimes judges through a vice-regent such as the Son of Man (1 En. 46:1ff) or his Messiah (2 Bar. 40:1-2; 72:2; 4 Ezra 12:32-34), but not in cooperation with the faithful.<sup>623</sup>

The closest to saints judging is found in the Qumran commentary on Habakkuk. 1QpHab 5:4-5 reads: “but in the hand of his chosen ones God will place the judgment over all the peoples; and by their reproof all the evildoers of his people will be pronounced guilty (by the reproof) of those who kept his commandments.”<sup>624</sup> Similarly Wis. 3:8 claims that the righteous “will judge [κρινούσιν] nations and will have power over [κρατήσουσιν] peoples and the Lord will reign over them forever” (Translation mine).<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Aune notes that the identity of those seated on the thrones is not clear. Some think that it is the twenty-four elders of Rev. 4-5 whereas “most commentators understand them to represent the entire Christian church.” He concludes that “the identity of those seated on the thrones is surely connected with the resurrected martyrs” Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084.

<sup>621</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 295-96.

<sup>622</sup> The notion that Israel will have authority over the nations in this age (as in Jub. 32:19) is quite different from Revelation’s description of a millennium in which there are no nations and the saints rule together with Christ.

<sup>623</sup> Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 383.

<sup>624</sup> Tr. Martinez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition—Two Vol. Set*, 15.

<sup>625</sup> The translation is intended to be literal. I believe the translation of the RSV mentioned in the next paragraph renders the intention of the author more accurately.

It is questionable whether these quotes can be taken to reflect mainstream Jewish expectations concerning the saints or the righteous judging the world. The commentary on Habakkuk seems to be the isolated view of the Qumran sect. The lack of other references in Qumran may suggest that this view was not popular within the community itself. Moreover, it seems that the passage emphasizes the faithful as those who accuse rather than being those who pass judgement. The judicial function of the faithful therefore may be best described as that of prosecutors rather than judges. As for Wis. 3:8, the judging seems to be closely associated with the authority the righteous will exercise over the nations. A parallelism subsists between the believers judging the nations and God's reign: *κρινούσιν ἔθνη ... καὶ βασιλεύσει αὐτῶν κύριος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας*. According to B.S. Easton, “‘judging’ is used in the Old Testament sense of ‘rule’”,<sup>626</sup> hence the RSV translates this verse as “They will govern [*κρινούσιν*] nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord will reign over them for ever.” Instead of suggesting that the Jewish believers will judge the nations, the passage probably reiterates one common Jewish belief that the nations will become subservient to the righteous Jewish believers.<sup>627</sup>

On the other hand, the New Testament contains several passages that assert the right of the saints to judge in the future, a tradition rooted in the sayings of Jesus. Both Matt. 19:28-29 and Luke 22:28-30 envision a time when the enthroned disciples of Jesus would judge the twelve tribes of Israel. These passages share with Revelation the themes of judgement and of thrones. In both cases, the time is the eschatological future during which the Father has granted Jesus the *kingdom* (*διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν*, Luke 22:29) or during the renewal when the son of God will sit on his throne of glory (*ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ, ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ*, Matt. 19:28). Both kingdom and thrones are central motifs in Revelation's millennial reign. Additionally, both instances include the theme of persecution, portraying the disciples who are to judge either as having stood with Christ in his trials (*διαμεμενηκότες μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τοῖς πειρασμοῖς μου*, Luke 22:28) or as people who have left families and earthly possessions for Christ's sake (*πᾶς ὅστις ἀφῆκεν οἰκίαν ἢ ἀδελφούς ἢ ἀδελφὰς ἢ πατέρα ἢ μητέρα ἢ τέκνα ἢ ἀγροὺς ἕνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματός μου*, Matt. 19:29).<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>626</sup> Burton Scott Easton, “Judgment, Last.” *ISBE* 3:1778.

<sup>627</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 291-92.

<sup>628</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1739-41. Davies notes that the Matthean saying has no parallel in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Davies, *Matthew*, 153.

Paul also uses the theme of the disciples as judges. However, in his writings the disciples include all believers. In 1 Cor. 4:5 Paul advises the Corinthians not to rush to judgement before they have all the facts straight. Apparently, that time will be when the Lord will come and will illuminate all that is hidden, including human motives.<sup>629</sup>

Therefore do not pronounce judgment [κρίνετε] before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God. (NRSV)

Later Paul repeats his claim that the saints will judge the world including the angels 1 Cor. 6:2-3.

Do you not know that the saints will judge [κρινούσιν] the world? And if the world is to be judged [κρίνεται] by you, are you incompetent to try [κριτηρίων] trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge [κρινοῦμεν] angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? (NRSV)

According to Fitzmyer, Paul claims that part of the eschatological destiny of Christians is to the judge the world with Christ and to “associate with his prerogatives those who are united with him.”<sup>630</sup> Fitzmyer is correct in asserting Paul’s expectation that believers will participate in the future judgement with Christ but he mistakenly supposes that Paul takes this from Dan. 7:22 where “judgment was given over to the ‘holy ones’.”<sup>631</sup> Keil cautions that an interpretation of Dan. 7:22 that suggests the saints were given a judicial function is opposed to the context of the passage. In Dan. 7:22 God delivers the judgement “and by that judgment justice is done to the people of God.”<sup>632</sup> This is why the NKJV renders the text as “judgment was made in favor of the saints” and the NIV as “the Ancient of Days ...pronounced judgment in favor of the saints”. The Aramaic ܐܬܬܝܬܬܝܢ may also mean a judgement (in the sense of verdict),<sup>633</sup> a view also supported by the LXX and the Theodotion text of Dan. 7:22. They read τὴν κρίσιν ἔδωκε τοῖς ἁγίοις and τὸ κρίμα ἔδωκεν ἁγίοις. κρίσιν and κρίμα both refer to judgement in the sense of legal decision.<sup>634</sup>

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<sup>629</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *I Corinthians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 214.

<sup>630</sup> Fitzmyer, *I Corinthians*, 252.

<sup>631</sup> Fitzmyer, *I Corinthians*, 252.

<sup>632</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel, Daniel*, 9:649.

<sup>633</sup> HALOT, s.v. “ܐܬܬܝܬܬܝܢ.”

<sup>634</sup> See LSJ, s.v. “κρίμα, κρίσις”.



The passage, therefore, does not describe the transfer of a legal process to the saints, but rather a verdict given in favour of the saints.<sup>635</sup>

The passages above not only bear witness to an early Christian expectation that the saints will judge the world, but also show that this will take place after the second coming and that judgement will have a cosmic character since the duty of the saints will be to pass judgement even on angels. They also demonstrate that the disciples or the believers judging the world was a prominent Christian theme. Once again, the events taking place during the millennium do not seem rooted in common, popular Jewish eschatological expectations, but in New Testament traditions.

### 6.3.3 The two resurrections

In Revelation, the millennium is described as the period between two resurrections. In the HB, the resurrection theme is very rare, seemingly alluded to in just a few passages (Job 19:26, Dan. 12:2 and possibly in Isa. 26:19.<sup>636</sup>) Groups such as the Sadducees, who accepted only the Pentateuch as inspired, did not even believe in the concept of resurrection.<sup>637</sup> During the time of Jesus, groups within Judaism such as the Pharisees believed in resurrection (Acts 23:6) and clearly Jesus did as well (Matt. 22:23-32). Likewise, many Jewish apocalypses refer to a future eschatological resurrection.<sup>638</sup> However, this is absent from the message of the classical prophets when they describe the messianic kingdom.

The idea of resurrection is a central eschatological expectation in the New Testament, however. The Johannine Jesus claims to be the resurrection and the life (John 11:25),<sup>639</sup> he speaks of two resurrections, that of life and that of judgement (John 5:29),<sup>640</sup> and Paul promises that during the second coming those who have died in Christ will be resurrected first (1 Thess. 4:16). In 1 Cor. 15:50, Paul ties the concept of resurrection to the kingdom of God and 1 Cor. 15:52 suggests that at the last trumpet the dead will rise imperishable. Once again, the concept

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<sup>635</sup> NETS renders the LXX verse as "...he gave the verdict for the holy ones..." and a footnote explains the "for" as "in favor of". Likewise, NETS translates the Theodotion text as "...he gave the judgment for the holy ones..." and again in a footnote the "for" is explained as "in favor of".

<sup>636</sup> Isa 26:19 may be a reference to physical resurrection or like Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones (Eze. 37), a reference to the restoration of the nation. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, 367-68.

<sup>637</sup> Robert Martin-Achard, "Resurrection," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, trans. Terrence Prendergast (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5: 680-684.

<sup>638</sup> For example: Dan 12:2; 1 En. 10:17; Sibylline Oracles IV 181-2, 187; 2 Bar 49:3-50:4.

<sup>639</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 190-91.

<sup>640</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 77. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, 133.

of resurrection is typical of New Testament expectations and probably absent from the classical prophetic expectations,<sup>641</sup> although it is present in Jewish apocalyptic works.

#### 6.3.4 John's allusions to the HB

John's conscious effort to steer away from the HB in describing the millennium can also be confirmed in his language. Although Revelation is replete with allusions to the HB, and virtually every verse echoes one or more HB passages, the millennial reign passage yields relatively few allusions. Their absence can be demonstrated by comparing the allusions found in the millennial reign to those found in the new Jerusalem and new earth passages in Rev. 21:1-22:5. For the sake of convenience and consistency, I used the numbers of allusions found by the UBS<sup>3</sup> in both biblical texts. According to the UBS<sup>3</sup>, Rev. 20:4-6, the passage that describes the millennial reign, contains only one allusion to two possible Septuagint passages; in v. 6, where John claims that the saints will be priests of God and of Christ (...ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ...). This verse alludes to Isa. 61:6 (LXX: ὑμεῖς δὲ ἱερεῖς κυρίου κληθήσεσθε) and Exod. 19:6 (LXX: ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλειον ἱεράτευμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον). It is interesting to note that even this allusion is not an exclusive HB theme. 1 Pet. 2:5,9 also claims that the believers are a royal priesthood (βασιλειον ἱεράτευμα). Koester points out that John could have "paraphrased or alluded to Old Testament passages in his description of the millennial kingdom if he had seen fit to do so; but this is not the case."<sup>642</sup> Indeed, it seems that John chose to strip this passage of elements that may have been associated with Jewish expectations.

When one counts the allusions to the HB in the description of the new Jerusalem in the new earth in Rev. 21:1-22:5, however, the UBS<sup>3</sup> lists 60 allusions in the thirty-two verses of the passage.<sup>643</sup> This is a ratio of slightly less than two (1.875) allusions per verse, whereas we noted previously only one allusion to the HB in the span of the three verses of Rev. 20:4-6 (0.333 allusions per verse). Admittedly, the comparison between the passages is problematic in this respect since the millennium passage is considerably shorter. The point, however, should not be missed. John's language, which is usually steeped in themes found in the HB, is noticeably different in his description of the millennial reign.

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<sup>641</sup> As noted earlier with the possible exception of Isa 26:19.

<sup>642</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 184.

<sup>643</sup> Koester notes that John makes "lavish use of Old Testament passages when describing the new Jerusalem." Koester, 184.

### 6.3.5 The location of the millennial kingdom

The clearest deviation of the millennial reign from the Jewish messianic expectations concerns its location. The Jewish messianic kingdom was to be on earth. Most Jewish hopes revolved around the restoration of the people of Israel, the possession of Palestine. Jerusalem and the temple were also focal points in these hopes,<sup>644</sup> all of which were to be fulfilled on earth. John departs from these expectations, as we saw in chapter 4.1, when he envisions the saints in heaven after the second coming. It will be shown that the location of the millennial kingdom perpetuates the image of the saints in heaven. I will argue below that the millennial reign in Revelation takes place in heaven, not on earth, which is consistent with New Testament expectations.

Most scholars assume that the millennial reign takes place on earth.<sup>645</sup> In Rev. 5:9-10 during the heavenly worship, the heavenly choir consisting of the twenty four elders and the four animals praises the lamb as worthy to take and open the scroll because it redeemed people from every nation and “made them a kingdom to our God and priests, and they will reign on earth” (ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς, καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς).

At first sight, this passage seems to locate the believers on earth during the millennial reign since the same language is used for the millennium (see Rev. 20:6 ἔσονται ἱερεῖς τοῦ θεοῦ ... καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν μετ’ αὐτοῦ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη). The problem with this view is that in Revelation’s scenario the believers will ultimately reign on the new earth, serving there as priests of God. In Rev. 22:5, the same language is used for the believers when they reign explicitly on earth (καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων). Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza also points out that the name of the lamb on the forehead of the believers (Rev. 22:4) depicts them as high priests.<sup>646</sup> It is entirely possible therefore, if not more probable, that the heavenly choir in Rev. 5:10 praises God for the ultimate reward of the believers on the new earth and not for their reward during their interim reign.

According to Aune, another reason why scholars often assume the millennial reign occurs on earth is that the surrounding millennial reign passages in Rev. 20:4-6, Rev. 20:1-3 and Rev. 20:7-10 are apparently located on earth. Nevertheless, he concedes that the location

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<sup>644</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 294-95.

<sup>645</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084.

<sup>646</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 112-13.

of the millennial reign is not explicitly mentioned.<sup>647</sup> Context would normally carry much weight in the study of most ancient texts. However, apocalyptic books, and Revelation in particular, vacillate between the heavenly and the earthly realm regularly, often with little forewarning of the change. Events that happen in heaven have direct consequences on earth. For example, as the Lamb in heaven breaks the seven seals of the scroll (Rev. 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1) cataclysmic events take place on earth on all but two occasions.<sup>648</sup> Likewise, the sealing of the 144,000 in Rev. 7 takes place on earth where the angels hold the winds till the sealing occurs (Rev. 7:1-3). And yet, without noting a change of venue John describes a multitude that stands before God's throne in heaven (Rev. 7:9).<sup>649</sup> Travelling between heaven and earth is not simply the privilege of angels and the apocalyptic prophet, both of which are regular features of the apocalyptic genre. Other characters, such as the two witnesses, are travelling to heaven (Rev. 11:12). Clearly, the boundaries between heaven and earth are easily crossed and the author changes his point of view frequently, often without notice.<sup>650</sup> Therefore, the fact that the surrounding passages of the millennium reign (Rev. 20:1-3; 7-10) are placed on earth is not necessarily an indicator that Rev. 20:4-6 also occurs on earth.<sup>651</sup>

Shea, who studies the locale of the millennial reign in relation to the context of Revelation, demonstrates that the three passages on the millennium (Rev. 20:1-3; 4-6; 7-10) follow a chiastic pattern parallel to that of Rev. 12.<sup>652</sup> He also notes that both chapters alternate locations between earth, heaven, and earth again.<sup>653</sup> Shea begins by noting that "Rev. 12 and 20 are located at relatively similar and corresponding positions in the book as the concluding sections of the historical and the main eschatological series respectively."<sup>654</sup> He also notes that these chapters share literary correspondence as well as correspondences "in thematic

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<sup>647</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1089.

<sup>648</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 153. The only exceptions are the fifth (Rev. 6:9) and seventh seal (Rev. 8:1).

<sup>649</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 147; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 171.

<sup>650</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 82-83.

<sup>651</sup> So Michel Gourgues, "The Thousand-Year Reign (Rev 20:1-6): Terrestrial or Celestial?," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1985): 678. Gourgues accepts that Rev. 20:1-3; 7-10 may describe events taking place on earth, but rejects the implication that the interjected millennial reign should also be understood as terrestrial.

<sup>652</sup> William Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 37-54.

<sup>653</sup> Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure," 49.

<sup>654</sup> Shea, "The Parallel Literary Structure," 38.

development and in alternation of the vertical and horizontal dimensions.”<sup>655</sup> He posits that just as John alternates between earth, heaven and then earth again in Rev. 12, the parallel passage of Rev. 20 alternates between earth (binding of Satan v.1-3), heaven (millennial reign v. 4-6) and earth again (last battle against the saints v.7-10) in the same parallel manner.<sup>656</sup> Shea’s study also addresses complicated parallel structures between the two passages (Rev. 12 and Rev. 20) which suggest intentionality on the part of the author.

An objection to this argument may be that these parallels make the change of locus between heaven and earth likely but do not necessitate it. It would have to be shown from the text itself that the millennial reign of the saints takes place in heaven. Actually, there are such indications. First is the existence of thrones in Rev. 20:4. Whenever throne(s) are mentioned in Revelation, up to this point in time, they are always located in heaven.<sup>657</sup> Only after the founding of the new earth is the throne of God transferred to the earth (Rev. 22:1, 3). Thus, the description of thrones in this passage is a strong indication that the saints are located in heaven during the millennium.<sup>658</sup>

Furthermore, the context of the narrative and the future descending course of the new Jerusalem is significant in determining the location of the millennial reign of the saints. The idea that the new Jerusalem is a heavenly city is nothing new, being a belief of both Christian and Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>659</sup> The notion however that the city comes down from heaven to earth (Rev. 21:2, 10) is not widespread. In fact, no other Jewish or early Christian source envisions a heavenly city descending to earth in a manner similar to that of Revelation.<sup>660</sup> The reason behind this odd imagery is that in Revelation the city is often a representation of the saints. Consequently, Rev. 21:2, 10 depicts the relocation of God’s saints to the renewed earth.

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<sup>655</sup> Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure,” 38.

<sup>656</sup> Several commentators have also observed the literary correspondence between these chapters and how specifically the devil’s names are listed in exactly the same way in each passage. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1082. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 262. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:141. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 352. Rowland, *Revelation*, 707. The parallels between the two passages have also been noted. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 992.

<sup>657</sup> Gourgues, “The Thousand-Year Reign (Rev 20:1-6): Terrestrial or Celestial?,” 679. The only exceptions are Rev. 2:13; 13:2 and 16:10, but there the throne is specifically said to be the throne of the Satan, the dragon and the beast respectively.

<sup>658</sup> So Beale, *John’s Use*, 376. Beale, however, understands this passage to describe the faithful dead transferred into heaven through their death and reigning there during the church age, not after the second coming.

<sup>659</sup> E.g., 2 Bar 4:2-6; Gal 4:26; Heb 11:10.

<sup>660</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 813.

For such an event to happen it is logically necessary that the saints be with Christ in heaven before they descend to earth.

The portrayal of the new Jerusalem in Revelation leaves little doubt that the city is also a representation of God's people, not only their final habitation.<sup>661</sup> Its introduction represents the city as a bride beautifully adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). The image of Jesus as the bridegroom and the people of God as the bride is frequent in the New Testament (e.g., Mark 2:19; John 3:29; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-23).<sup>662</sup> More significantly, John already has told us that the saints are the Lamb's bride in Rev. 19:7-9. The symbols and the dimensions of the city recall the HB's and Revelation's symbols for the people of Israel and the saints. For instance, the number twelve, the number of the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles, the founders of Israel and the church, is prominent in the city's description. The city has twelve gates, on which there are twelve angels and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev. 21:12). The city wall has twelve foundational stones with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 21:14). The names of the stones recall the stones on the breastplate of the high priest,<sup>663</sup> which were a symbol of God's people. The twelve gates are made of twelve pearls (Rev. 21:21). The tree of life produces twelve kinds of fruit (Rev. 21:2). Multiples of twelve are also present with the dimensions of the city, which is twelve thousand stadia long, wide and high. Since the city is cubical<sup>664</sup> in shape it must have twelve edges, each being 12,000 stadia long. The multiplication of the edges with their length (12x12,000) results in 144,000, which is also the number of God's people who bear his seal in Rev. 7:4; 14:1. The city wall is also 144 cubits thick.<sup>665</sup> Once again, John uses the square of the number twelve that "symbolizes throughout Revelation the completeness of the end-time people of God."<sup>666</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> For a study on this, see Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 383; Robert H. Gundry, "The new Jerusalem: People as Place, Not Place for People," *Novum Testamentum* 29, no. 3 (1987): 254-64, Robert W. Wall, *Revelation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 243; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1074.

<sup>662</sup> R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 145.

<sup>663</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 342.

<sup>664</sup> So Osborne, *Revelation*, 752-53; Koester, *Revelation*, 816. An alternative that Osborne rejects is that the city is shaped as a pyramid reflecting the Babylonian ziggurats. The cubical shape of the most holy place in Solomon's temple is probably the basis for the shape of the new Jerusalem. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 254; Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 250. See also chapter 9.3.2.

<sup>665</sup> John does not mention whether the height or the width of the wall is referred to here but since in antiquity the width of the wall was important and often described, it is best to assume that Rev. 21:17 is a reference to its width. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1162.

<sup>666</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 243-44.

Some scholars see the new Jerusalem as a double image of the city of God (i.e., the dwelling place of the saints), as well as the bride of the Lamb (i.e., the people of God). In this case, the new Jerusalem is both people and a place, just like Babylon.<sup>667</sup> Others prefer to understand the image of the new Jerusalem as distinguished from the saints.<sup>668</sup> The argument here is valid whether the city is the saints themselves, their dwelling place, or both. The new Jerusalem as an image of the saints' habitation or a representation of God's people coming down from heaven suggests that the saints were in heaven, either living in the new Jerusalem or forming part of it. The suggestion that the saints were on earth during the millennium would require a hypothetical trip to heaven and then a subsequent return, but this is not mentioned or even hinted at in Revelation.<sup>669</sup>

One objection to this scenario would be that the saints were divided into two classes, some of whom stayed on earth (during the millennium) while others (i.e., the martyrs) were taken to heaven. This theory does not have merit either. In Rev. 20:4, where the millennial reign is described, John sees people sitting on thrones, presumably the saints, and certainly among them are martyrs since they are identified as beheaded (πεπελεκισμένοι, Rev. 20:4). Thus, even if this theory is correct Rev. 20:4 describes events that take place in heaven.

Additionally, the saints who participate in the millennial reign are those who have not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads and hands (Rev. 20:4). The group in Revelation that stands opposed to those who have taken the mark of the beast are those who have taken God's seal on their foreheads. They are the 144,000 (Rev. 7: 1-8; 14:1) and they follow the Lamb wherever he goes (Rev. 14:5). In Rev. 14:3, that group is specifically viewed before God's throne, the four living creatures and the elders.<sup>670</sup> Even if

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<sup>667</sup> Roloff, 236; Osborne, *Revelation*, 733.

<sup>668</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Priester Für Gott : Studien Zum Herrschafts- und Priestermotiv in der Apokalypse*, Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), 348-50. Cited in Aune, *Revelation* 17-22, 1122.

<sup>669</sup> Charles seems to believe this notion, claiming that "[t]his removal from earth is not expressly stated, but it is undoubtedly presupposed." Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:157. To support his claim, he cites "analogous" expectations in contemporary Jewish literature but no evidence from Revelation. The "analogous" expectations are not that analogous either. Both 2 Bar. 6:6-10 and 2 Macc. 2:4-8 describe visions or stories in which temple artefacts ephod, precious stones and the ark were hidden in the earth (by angels in Baruch and Jeremiah in 2 Maccabees) to be restored when Jerusalem itself would be restored. These texts spoke of the city of Jerusalem being restored after its destruction and then those artefacts restored to it. It is unclear how they can apply to Rev. 20:9 when Jerusalem is not destroyed nor even breached. Charles believes that this Jerusalem (not to be associated with the Jerusalem of John's time that is considered impure) will be renewed like the new Jerusalem that will come from heaven right after the millennium.

<sup>670</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 267; Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 263.

the saints of Revelation were divided into two classes, the saints identified as those bearing God's seal (and consequently not receiving the mark of the beast) would certainly be those who are in heaven not on earth. This is also verified by the fact that the numbers 144 and 144,000 are found in the description of the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven. Therefore, the description of the saints during the millennium fits the description of the 144,000 who are with the Lamb in heaven.

The presence of the saints in heaven is clearly portrayed in Rev. 7:9-17. The passage shares affinities with both Rev. 19:1-8 and Rev. 20:4-6. It is proleptic, foreshadowing a future event.<sup>671</sup> The venue where the saints are portrayed is heaven. The multitude of believers are before God's throne (Rev. 7:9, 11), accompanied by angels, elders and the four animals who are also in heaven (Rev. 4:4, 6, 5:8, 11, 14 cf. Rev. 4:1). The timing is after the great tribulation (Rev. 7:14 cf. Rev. 19:1-2; Rev. 20:4). Charles understands the image as that of martyrs arriving from the great tribulation and receiving as a reward their white robes (στολάς λευκάς, Rev. 7:9).<sup>672</sup> However, there is no evidence from the text that this group contains only martyrs or that other martyrs are still arriving from the great tribulation. As Krodell points out, not only martyrs are clothed in white robes (see Rev. 3:4-5).<sup>673</sup> The participle ἐρχόμενοι (Rev. 7:14) can also be translated in the perfect sense as "those who have come" from the tribulation.<sup>674</sup> Mounce observes that the context "favours a point in time when the complete number of the redeemed stand before God and the blessings of the eternal state are about to be realized."<sup>675</sup> The fact that they are not portrayed as spirits or souls but as people with actual hands who carry palm branches (Rev. 7:9) strongly suggests that this event follows a resurrection. Resurrection in Revelation is not an individual event after death but is collective for all believers at the beginning of the millennium (Rev. 20:4-5).<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 171. Krodell, *Revelation*, 184..

<sup>672</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 1:213. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 444.

<sup>673</sup> Krodell, *Revelation*, 184.

<sup>674</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 324. Contra Beale, who thinks that the passage speaks of believers who are added to the crowd at death. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 444. However, the context points to a different conclusion as Osborne notes. The verbs that follow the participle are both in the aorist (ἐπλυναν, ἐλεύκαναν, Rev. 7:14). More importantly, the elder's question to John is also in the aorist. The elder asks πόθεν ἦλθον not πόθεν ἔρχονται (Rev. 7:13). If the saints were still arriving at the scene then the appropriate way for the elder to ask the question would be "πόθεν ἔρχονται".

<sup>675</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 173.

<sup>676</sup> See chapter 7.1.



These saints are said to stand before God's throne and serve him day and night in his temple (εἰσιν ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ λατρεύουσιν αὐτῷ ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, Rev. 7:15). The notion that God dwells in a heavenly temple is a common image in Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>677</sup> Angels usually minister in this heavenly temple and offer bloodless sacrifices on behalf of the righteous (*T. Levi* 3:5-6). In some cases, extraordinary individuals such as Enoch are also allowed to participate in these services by offering incense to God (*Jub.* 4:25).<sup>678</sup> Levi is another individual specifically named as a priest of God in heaven (*T. Levi* 2:9-10) and clothed with priestly garments (στολὴν τῆς ἱερατείας, *T. Levi* 8:2).

The crowd before God's throne functions as priests before God. First, they serve (λατρεύουσιν) God. The verb λατρεύω is used 70 times in the LXX to translate the Hebrew עָבַד which means to serve. In all these instances, the word is used in a religious sense. In non-religious contexts such as human relations, עָבַד is translated as δουλεύειν.<sup>679</sup> The word in the LXX therefore carries "cultic and priestly connotations."<sup>680</sup> Second, the notion of continuing worship (day and night) also appears often in cultic contexts (διέταξε δὲ πᾶσι τοῖς ἐκ τῆς Ληουίτιδος φυλῆς καὶ τοῖς ἱερεῦσι δουλεύειν κατὰ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν τῷ θεῷ, [He ordered all the Levites and the priests to serve God night and day, Josephus, *Ant.*, 7.14.7]). Third, the garments of the crowd may suggest priestly investiture like that of Levi in the *T. Levi* 8:2. In both cases, the garments are called robes (στολή). Wilckens observes that "often the idea prevails that the clothing denoted by στολή is not just an outward covering but is something by which a man is essentially stamped in his current status."<sup>681</sup> Being dressed, therefore, in a στολή suggests investiture. The priestly clothes were also called στολή.<sup>682</sup> In order to sanctify their robes, the priests were instructed to sprinkle them with blood from the altar (Exod. 29:21). It may not be coincidental that the heavenly crowd of Rev. 7:14 made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14). To sum up, the presence of the crowd in the heavenly temple, their continual service, as well as their white garments identifies them as priests serving before God. This

<sup>677</sup> See Giantzaklidis, "The Heavenly Temple in Noncanonical Apocalyptic Literature," 267-98; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 477-78.

<sup>678</sup> Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 25.

<sup>679</sup> H. Strathmann, "λατρεύω," in *TDNT* (Eerdmans, 1976), 4:60.

<sup>680</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 327.

<sup>681</sup> U. Wilckens, "στολή," in *TDNT* (Eerdmans, 1976), 7:688.

<sup>682</sup> See, for example, Exod. 28:2; 31:10; 35:19; Lev. 8:2; Num. 20:26.

alludes to several Revelation passages, especially to Rev. 20:6 where the believers are called priests of God.<sup>683</sup>

The most relevant point of this passage for our study is that after the great tribulation described in Rev. 13:11-17 (cf. Rev. 20:4), the believers are in heaven not simply as spirits but as corporeal beings that worship and serve God along with other heavenly beings. If the millennium reign of believers is located on earth, and clearly believers are located on the new earth afterwards (Rev. 21:1-2) there is no other time frame for believers to be found in heaven.

The same conclusion can be drawn by studying the believers in Rev. 15:2-4. The believers there are described as those who came victorious from the battle with the beast and its image (τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ, Rev. 15:2). The time frame of this passage is similar to that of Rev. 7:14. The believers are standing on the sea of glass (ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην, Rev. 15:2), which is located in heaven in front of God's throne (Rev. 4:6).<sup>684</sup> The fact that the believers are standing suggests their triumph.<sup>685</sup> In two other triumphal images, the saints are standing (Rev. 7:9) as is the Lamb after being slain (Rev. 5:6). Beale proposes that the standing posture of the saints may suggest their resurrection just as it implied resurrection for the Lamb in Rev. 5:6.<sup>686</sup> Koester agrees with this conclusion, taking the sea of glass as an allusion to the Israelite's crossing of the Red Sea. The fact that the victors in Rev. 15:2-4 sing the Song of Moses makes this allusion very likely.<sup>687</sup> In the immediate context, "the horses of God's adversaries have been engulfed in a torrent of blood" (Rev. 14:20) just as Pharaoh's horses perished in the Red Sea (Exod. 15:19).<sup>688</sup> The victors in Revelation stand on the shores of the sea of glass just as the Israelites stood on the shore of the Red Sea. Whereas the first crossing was local, John's vision is cosmic in scale and represents not only the crossing of a sea but the crossing from earth to heaven. Koester concludes that "deliverance is not simply an escape from death-since some conquerors do die (12:11)-but an overcoming of death through resurrection."<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>683</sup> Other passages where the believers are called priests of God are in Rev. 1:6; 5:10.

<sup>684</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 633; Osborne, *Revelation*, 561-62; Roloff, *Revelation*, 182; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 204.

<sup>685</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 632.

<sup>686</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 791.

<sup>687</sup> Ironically, the words of the song of Moses in Revelation deviate greatly from the words of the song of Moses in Exod. 15:1-18. Roloff, *Revelation*, 183.

<sup>688</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 633.

<sup>689</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 634.

Both passages, Rev. 7:9-17 and Rev. 15:2-4, share many common points. Both picture the saints as victorious in heaven, after a tribulation that is specifically mentioned in Rev. 20:4.<sup>690</sup> In both passages, the image is not of souls entering heaven as they die but of believers who praise God and are able to hold items in their hands such as palm fronds or harps (Rev. 7:9; 15:2). This is also the image Rev. 19:1-8 depicts at the wedding banquet of the Lamb.<sup>691</sup> The saints are in heaven (Rev. 19:1), the twenty-four elders and the four animals are present as well as God seated on his throne (Rev. 19:4). The believer's song also alludes to their tribulations at the hands of Babylon (Rev. 19:2). It appears that John's consistent view is that the believers after the great tribulation and the battle with the beast are taken to heaven and do not remain on earth. This view is compatible with a millennial reign in heaven and incompatible with a reign on earth.

An apparent problem in the interpretation that the millennial reign occurs in heaven emerges when, at the end of the thousand years, the satanic forces surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (Rev. 20:9). I translate Rev. 20:9 as follows: "And they ascended on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints *that is* [*καί*] the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them". I translate the *καί* epexegetically because the camp of the saints is not a separate entity but rather the beloved city, the new Jerusalem.<sup>692</sup> The suggestion that the camp of the saints refers to the people of God camping outside the city walls in anticipation of the battle, fails to note that the city is a symbol of God's people in Revelation and suggests that the saints are preparing to fight a physical battle although Revelation never speaks of the saints taking part in a battle with weapons. God or Jesus is always the one who defeats the enemies of God's people. Neither is the suggestion that the

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<sup>690</sup> Krodel aptly observes that both Rev. 7:9-17 and Rev. 15:2-4 are previews of the church of the millennium. Krodel, *Revelation*, 277.

<sup>691</sup> See chapter 4.1.

<sup>692</sup> On the epexegetical use of *καί* in Revelation see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxvx. However, Aune does not include the *καί* of Rev. 20:9 in this category. Aune lists five distinct views of commentators and criticizes some of them but refrains from picking up his favourite position. Aune first cites Charles's view identifying the camp as the heavenly city. This identification is somewhat misleading. While it is true that Charles believes the city came down from heaven he also believes that it was the earthly millennial Jerusalem (not to be confused with the earthly and sinful Jerusalem present in John's time). Charles believes this Jerusalem will be withdrawn from the world after the Gog and Magog battle, and will be renewed and return to the New Heaven and Earth. Charles's complicated position is part of his attempt to restore the correct order of the last chapters of Revelation. The next view is that the camp of the saints is identical to the beloved city, which I adopt here too. Aune documents this view with most references from commentators as well as Qumran manuscripts referring to Jerusalem as the holy camp. It should be noted that these commentators do not necessarily claim that this is the city that came down from heaven. The third view is that the encampment refers to the people of God outside the city in anticipation of the battle. The fourth is that it refers to the martyrs with Christ in Jerusalem. On the last view, the camp means angels prepared to protect and fight for the saints. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1097.

camp of the saints refers to angels protecting God's people valid. As Aune points out "in Revelation there is never a hint that human beings and angels fight together in any eschatological battle".<sup>693</sup>

The notion that the saints are surrounded by the evil forces after the end of the millennium on earth seems to suggest that they were dwelling on earth the whole time. Some scholars who prefer the celestial location for the millennial reign respond that the notion of earthly wicked forces attacking saints in heaven is not incompatible with the spatial rules of Revelation.<sup>694</sup> In Rev. 19:11-19, earthly forces attacked the Divine Warrior, who appeared in heaven. Here, however, it is unlikely that John describes a similar incident. The nations are firmly described on the expanse of the earth and the saints are also portrayed on earth as surrounded by the evil forces in Rev. 20:9. At the same time, the suggestion that the beloved city was on earth during the millennium is impossible, implying as it does that the new Jerusalem was on earth in Rev. 20:9 before it came down from heaven (Rev. 21:2, 10).<sup>695</sup> The only logical way to understand this apparent discrepancy is to explain it as yet another example of the stylistic *hysteron proteron* literary device we encountered before.<sup>696</sup> In this case, we see the beloved city, the new Jerusalem, surrounded in Rev. 20:9 before we are told of its descent from heaven in Rev. 21:2.<sup>697</sup> The reason why John uses the *hysteron proteron* device may be his style of dealing with eschatological issues thematically. Rev. 20 deals with the problem of the devil and the judgement he will suffer, whereas Rev. 21 turns to a new page of the new heaven and new earth. Although some events of these two themes overlap chronologically, John wants to portray them in separate passages. His ultimate aim may be that he does not want to sully the description of the new Jerusalem, which is the pure bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2) with the images of judgement against Satan's final assault that follow her descent to earth chronologically.

The transitional nature of the "beloved city" in Rev. 20:9 is also indicated by its being called "the camp of the saints" (παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων), an allusion to the Israelite

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<sup>693</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1097.

<sup>694</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, "The Millennium (Rev 20.4-6) as Heaven," *New Testament Studies* 45, no. 4 (1999): 553-70; Gourgues, "The Thousand-Year Reign (Rev 20:1-6): Terrestrial or Celestial?"

<sup>695</sup> The beloved city cannot be the earthly Jerusalem, since for John the earthly Jerusalem was "Sodom and Egypt" Rev. 11:8, Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:190.

<sup>696</sup> Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 243-44. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 347.

<sup>697</sup> So Tonstad who claims that "[t]his is a striking example of [John's] tendency to reverse the logical order." Tonstad, *Revelation*, 290.

encampments during their wandering in the desert on their way to the promised land.<sup>698</sup> Mounce's explanation that "it is a reminder that while on earth the people of God will always be pilgrims in a foreign land"<sup>699</sup> is inadequate. First, the final home of the saints according to Revelation is on earth (Rev. 5:10; 21:10). Mounce's statement would make sense if after a supposed thousand-year reign on earth the saints were transferred to their final perfect habitation *away* from earth. The saints will not be pilgrims eternally, but eventually arrive at their destination, just as wandering Israel eventually reached the promised land. Second, one could hardly describe a thousand-year reign as a temporary encampment like that of the Israelites in the desert. The best explanation of why the "beloved city" is described as a camp is because after the thousand years the city/people of God travelled from heaven to earth. Just like ancient Israel, God's people in Rev. 20:9 have formed their camp in anticipation of their final and permanent habitation on the new earth.

#### **Order of events at the millennium:**

Rev. 20:1-3 devil is bound,

Rev. 20:4-6 millennial reign/judgement,

Rev. 21:2, 10 descent of Jerusalem at the end of the 1000 years,

Rev. 20:7-10 Second resurrection/Satan's final deception and his defeat,

Rev. 20:11-15 judgement before the great throne (an expansion of Rev. 20:9-10).

Rev. 21:1. New heaven and earth.

The millennial reign in heaven is perhaps the greatest departure from the HB expectations for the messianic kingdom. At the same time, the notion that the saints are with Christ in heaven during the millennium is the fulfilment of early Christian expectations.<sup>700</sup> For instance, according to the gospel of John Jesus promised his disciples in John 14:3 to come again and take them to a place he prepares for them so that they will be always with him.<sup>701</sup> The same expectation is described by Paul in 1 Thess. 4:17 in which the living saints alongside the

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<sup>698</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 363; Osborne, *Revelation*, 714. There are many examples of the LXX using the word *παρεμβολή* to describe Israel's encampment; e.g., Exod. 14:19; 32:17; 33:7; Lev. 10:4; Num. 2:2-3; Deut. 2:14.

<sup>699</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 363.

<sup>700</sup> Tonstad specifically claims that "key texts in the NT suggest (explicitly) that the redeemed 'go to heaven'". Tonstad, *Revelation*, 291.

<sup>701</sup> Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John*, 297; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 250.

resurrected dead believers will be “taken in the clouds to meet the lord in the air; and thus be always with the lord.”<sup>702</sup> The theme of the saints gathered for Christ at the second coming also appears in the synoptic tradition in Matt. 24:30-31 and Mark 13:26-27 where angels collect all the believers. The second coming aside, all these passages emphasize Christ’s reunification with his saints.<sup>703</sup> The first two explicitly and the last two implicitly<sup>704</sup> expect the believers to be taken to heaven to be with Jesus. Clearly a heavenly millennium is not an image contrary to New Testament expectations; it is the instantiation of these expectations.

When we add the notion of the resurrection, the idea that the believers will judge and reigning together with Christ, the natural conclusion is that John fashioned the millennium purposely from traditions that were rooted in his Christian beliefs. It cannot be argued that John was not aware of the HB expectations for God’s eschatological kingdom. John’s deep knowledge of the HB is incontrovertible. In fact, next we will demonstrate that John “saved” these HB eschatological notions for later in order to describe the new earth.<sup>705</sup>

## 6.4 The portrayal of the new earth in Rev. 21-22:5

The descent of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21 is accompanied by a voice that confirms that God’s dwelling will be with his people and they will be his people, while he will be their God with them (σκηνώσει μετ’ αὐτῶν, καὶ αὐτοὶ λαοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται, καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς μετ’ αὐτῶν ἔσται

<sup>702</sup> So Joseph Plevnik, “The Taking Up of the Faithful and the Resurrection of the Dead in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (April 1984): 274-83; Joseph Plevnik, “The Destination of the Apostle and of the Faithful: Second Corinthians 4:13b-14 and First Thessalonians 4:14,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (January 2000): 83-95. Cf. Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 333-36. Weima argues that the believers going to meet (εἰς ἀπάντησιν) the coming Christ in the air, resembles formal Hellenistic receptions where a delegation of leading citizens were sent outside the city to welcome the visiting dignitary. Cosby, however, who studied ἀπάντησις found that the term was not technical and that “all the main elements of Hellenistic receptions are missing from 1 Thess. 4:15-17.” Michael R. Cosby, “Hellenistic Formal Receptions and Paul’s Use of Αἰγιανθῆσις in 1 Thessalonians 4:17,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 4 (1994): 15. In any case, Paul does not describe a delegation going to meet Jesus. The passive ἀρπαγησόμεθα suggests the believers are taken; they are not going to heaven. Plevnik, “The Destination of the Apostle and of the Faithful,” 88.

<sup>703</sup> Heb. 9:28 also adds the emotional aspect of the believers expectations as the author writes that “he will appear to those that await him *eagerly* for salvation” (ὁφθῆσεται τοῖς αὐτὸν ἀπεκδεχομένοις εἰς σωτηρίαν) [Emphasis mine]. Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 154.

<sup>704</sup> Matt. 24:30-31 and Mark 13:26-27 do not explicitly state where the believers are taken. However, Culpepper correctly points out the relationship between Mark 13:26-27 and 1 Thess. 4:15-17. The gathering of the believers then implies the transfer of the believers in heaven as in 1 Thess. Culpepper, *Mark*, 466.

<sup>705</sup> Boring speaks of “massive elements of Jewish tradition in John’s picture of the new Jerusalem”. Boring, *Revelation*, 214.

[αὐτῶν θεός], Rev. 21:3). The verse is almost a verbatim reference to Ezekiel's prediction, who foretold that God's dwelling (κατασκήνωσις, Ezek. 37:27 LXX) would be with his people, while he would be their God and they his people (ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς θεός καὶ αὐτοὶ μου ἔσονται λαός, Ezek. 37:27). The same idea is repeated in Zechariah, Jeremiah, and Leviticus.<sup>706</sup> John describes in this text a fulfilment of multiple HB eschatological expectations that God will dwell with his people and they will share a strong relationship.

Next in Revelation comes the restoration of past deaths, mourning, and pains. John claims that God will wipe every tear from their eyes (καὶ ἐξαλείψει πᾶν δάκρυον ἐκ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτῶν, καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι οὔτε πένθος οὔτε κραυγὴ οὔτε πόνος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι, [ὅτι] τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν, Rev. 21:4). Again, this image of restoration is taken from an HB promise about God's future reign. In Isa. 25:6, God prepares a banquet for all people on his mountain with abundant food and wine. He will defeat death and will wipe the tears away from all their faces.<sup>707</sup> Beale correctly points out that John continues "a line of thought that the bliss of the eternal state is a fulfilment of prophecy."<sup>708</sup>

Central to the description of the new earth is the new Jerusalem. As we saw, the new Jerusalem was fundamental to the prophetic expectations.<sup>709</sup> Isaiah foretold that the "house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains" (Isa. 2:2 NRSV). In order to view the new Jerusalem, John is taken to a high mountain. This reference may not be simply a location that describes a good vantage point for John to view the descent. It is also probably where the new Jerusalem will rest.<sup>710</sup> In the HB, the mountain of the Lord was the mountain where his Temple was built. God's presence moved from Mount Sinai to his sanctuary in Jerusalem (Ps. 68:12), that was built on Mount Zion.<sup>711</sup> This mountain of the Lord played a

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<sup>706</sup> Lev. 26:12; Jer. 24:7; 38:1; 38:33 (LXX references); Eze. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8. Ladd calls it "an echo of ... [an] Old Testament idiom." Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 277.

<sup>707</sup> The LXX offers a different meaning to the Hebrew text. According to the LXX, death prevailed and swallowed people and as a response God removed the people's tears (κατέπιεν ὁ θάνατος ἰσχύσας καὶ πάλιν ἀφείλεν ὁ θεὸς πᾶν δάκρυον ἀπὸ παντὸς προσώπου). The Hebrew text suggests that God will swallow death, and then the Lord will wipe away their tears. In this case, John seems to follow the Hebrew text more closely since death in Revelation is simply referred to because of its absence in the New Earth.

<sup>708</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1049.

<sup>709</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 183.

<sup>710</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 249.

<sup>711</sup> The identification of the location of Mt Zion may have changed several times but it is clear enough that the prophets identified the Temple Mount as Zion see Isa. 2:3, Joel 2:17; Mic. 4:2; Zech 8:3. Bargil Pixner, *Paths of the Messiah and Sites of the Early Church from Galilee to Jerusalem: Jesus and Jewish Christianity in Light of Archaeological Discoveries* (Ignatius Press, 2010).

crucial role in Jewish future expectations (Isa. 2:1-5; 11:1-9; Eze. 20:39-44; Dan. 2:35, 44; Mic. 4:1-5; Zech. 8:3-7).

Next, John spends considerable space describing the new Jerusalem. The cubic shape of the city (Rev. 21:16) alludes to the cubic shape of the most holy place (1 Kgs 6:20).<sup>712</sup> John wanted his readers to associate the new Jerusalem with the place where God's presence resided.<sup>713</sup> The twelve precious stones that decorate the foundations of the city walls are probably allude to the twelve precious stones adorning the high priest's breastplate.<sup>714</sup> Just as the stones on the high priest's breastplate were a symbol of the twelve tribes of Israel in Revelation these stones represent God's people. The image is a fulfilment of the promise to the church in Philadelphia that the overcomer will become a pillar in the temple of God (Rev. 3:12). John declares that he saw no temple in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22a). However, immediately after this he adds that God and the Lamb function as its temple (ὁ γὰρ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ναὸς αὐτῆς ἐστὶν καὶ τὸ ἄρνιον, Rev. 21:22b). This implies that the traditional function of the temple as a location mediating access to God is unnecessary in the new Jerusalem since such mediation is required. In this context, John declares that the glory of God and the light of the Lamb shine on the new Jerusalem and the nations are guided by its light (Rev. 21:23-24).

The image of the nations streaming to Jerusalem was a common eschatological Jewish expectation.<sup>715</sup> In Isa. 60:3, the light of the future Jerusalem would make gentiles and kings stream to her brightness. Ps. 68:29 expects kings to bring gifts because of the Jerusalem temple. These gifts were not only monetary but also included the return of exiles to their land (Isa. 66:20; 60:4). Despite the influx of the nations into the new Jerusalem, John also portrays it as a pure place into which anything that is unholy, or those who commit abominations, tell lies or those whose names are not registered in the book of life will not enter (πάν κοινὸν καὶ [ὁ] ποιῶν βδέλυγμα καὶ ψεῦδος εἰ μὴ οἱ γεγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἁγίου, Rev. 21:27). Likewise, nothing accursed will ever be there (καὶ πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔστι ἔτι, Rev. 22:3). As has already been seen, the purity of God's future kingdom was also an HB eschatological expectation for God's kingdom. For instance, Isaiah prophesied: "Your people shall all be

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<sup>712</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1161.

<sup>713</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 380. Osborne, *Revelation*, 197.

<sup>714</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 342.

<sup>715</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 290.



righteous; they shall possess the land forever. They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified” (Isa. 60:21 NRSV).

For the theme of abundant food, health, and longevity John borrows images primarily from Ezekiel. The tree of life exists in the new Jerusalem. The tree produces fruit every month, which suggests abundance and its leaves bring healing to the nations (Rev. 22:2). Moreover, the water that flows from God’s throne and across the city is called the river of the water of life (Rev. 22:1). The river brings life and fertility. This motif is taken from Ezekiel, echoing his description of the new temple. Ezekiel’s river flows from the temple (Ezek. 47:1), producing life (Ezek. 47:9) and watering the trees growing on its banks Ezek. 47:12. Its leaves are to be used for healing (Ezek. 47:12).<sup>716</sup>

Most scholars attempt to assign to the millennium some sort of Jewish expectation or function. Since the intermediate messianic reign was to take place on earth, these scholars often conclude that John took the same view.<sup>717</sup> The previous analysis however, demonstrated that the concept of an interim kingdom is neither particularly Jewish nor does its description in Revelation carries any obvious Jewish overtones. On the contrary, it emerged that the themes and expectations the millennium anticipated were primarily Christian. Various Christian traditions expected Jesus to come and take his believers home to heaven with him. Whenever the eschatological location of the believers is related in the New Testament it is always heaven.<sup>718</sup> Central to these expectations was the belief that at the second coming the believers would reunite with Jesus. This relational aspect of the believers and Christ is also found in the millennium. As Koester notes, John repeatedly refrains from explicitly describing the location of the millennial reign, describing it in relational terms by simply stating that the believers “reigned with Christ.”<sup>719</sup> This expectation that the saints will go to heaven could not be readily reconciled with Jewish expectations for the eschatological reward of the saints that was always earthbound. The notion of the interim kingdom allows for the harmonization of both views.

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<sup>716</sup> Beale understands the usage of Ezek. 47:1, 12 in Revelation as clear examples of expectations of future fulfilment. Beale, *John’s Use*, 115-16.

<sup>717</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:184-85.

<sup>718</sup> The only exception may be Matt. 5:5 where the meek will inherit the earth. The passage is probably an allusion to Ps. 37:11. Davies, *Matthew*, 50. The “earth” probably refers to the “land” and is not eschatological. Weima argues that the final resting place of the believers is the earth, supporting this with Rom. 8:19-22, 2 Pet. 3:1-13 and Rev. 21:1-2, 10. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 320. Both epistolary passages focus on the need for the creation to be liberated from the bondage and effect of sin. None of the passages deal explicitly with the journey of the believers at the second coming in the manner of 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

<sup>719</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 788.

During the interim kingdom mainly Christian traditions and expectations are being fulfilled whereas the new earth fulfils the expectations of the Hebrew prophets. Aune is correct concerning the awkward presence of several dual themes in these chapters.<sup>720</sup> He correctly observes that Christian beliefs in the divinity of the messiah necessitated a different kind of interim kingdom. What Aune failed to note is the extent of Christian influence on the messianic kingdom. Since for John the messiah was Jesus, his promises, teachings and the Christian traditions were paramount in the construction of that passage. At the same time, John was mindful of the prophecies about the end made by the prophets whom he considered to be his fellow servants and brothers (Rev. 22:9). Their teaching was to be the basis for John's description of the eternal state of the redeemed.

These conclusions have repercussions on the main subject of this study, the fate of the nations. First, the saints in heaven confirm the conclusion of chapter 4 that the saints were transferred there. Second, coupled with the idea that the wicked were killed during their encounter with the Divine Warrior, the absence of the saints from earth suggests an earth that is completely desolate and void of human life. This corroborates the conclusion we arrived at in chapter 5 that the binding of Satan is symbolic of his solitary confinement on earth with no nations to deceive. Third, and perhaps most important for the fate of the nations, John does not follow the Jewish eschatological model for the end, at least for the duration of the millennium. Some Hebrew prophets envisioned scenarios during which the nations after the plagues will repent and worship together with Israel.<sup>721</sup> But Revelation's messianic kingdom does not draw from these traditions, which is why Rev. 20:4-6 contains no hint of a second chance for the nations.

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<sup>720</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1108.

<sup>721</sup> E.g., Isa. 19:22-25; Zech. 14:16 (cf. Ps. Sol. 17:31). For various Jewish expectations concerning Israel's relationship with the nations, see Sanders, *Judaism*, 289-94.

## 7. The re-emergence of the nations

Besides describing the millennium as a time of reigning and judging, Revelation delineates the period using two sets of contrasting events. The first deals with the motif of binding and releasing Satan (Rev. 20:2; 7). Satan was bound for a thousand years in Rev. 20:2 and it was foretold in Rev. 20:3 that he would be released when the thousand years were completed in Rev. 20:7. At the same time, John uses a second set of events to mark the beginning and end of the thousand year period, the two resurrections (Rev. 20:4, 5). This chapter will deal first with the two resurrections. Attention will be paid to the question of who takes part in these resurrections. The second resurrection and its aftermath are important as they pertain to the nations. It will be argued below that the first resurrection is that of the righteous who enjoy a thousand-year reign with Christ, whereas the second resurrection is that of the wicked nations. This second resurrection will provide Satan again with subjects to deceive and armies to gather in order to fight God (Rev. 20:8). As before, his plan is doomed to failure and will end in utter defeat. His armies will be devoured by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:9), and he will be thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). It will be argued that the HB provided John ample background images to depict this attack. John took over and modified these images to achieve his own prophetic purposes. The inescapable conclusion from the events described is that once more, even after the thousand years have passed, neither Satan nor the nations will repent. Our attention will turn next to the judgement before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). It will be argued that the scene is a recapitulation of the assault of the nations on the saints. Although the wicked are not specifically named as nations, the fact that this scene is connected thematically with the previous battle demands that we understand the fate of the wicked as part of John's outline of the fate of the nations. John's treatment of the wicked in Rev. 20:15 is consistent with our previous conclusions on Rev. 20:7-11. Once again, the text leaves no room for the repentance of the nations.

### 7.1 The first resurrection

In another example of *hysteron proteron*, John first describes the participants and the events of the millennial reign, and only then the event that makes that reign possible, their resurrection. As a result, we hear first of thrones, people who sit upon them, judgement that was given to them, and the souls of those beheaded for the testimony of Jesus. We are also told that they did

not worship the beast or its image and did not receive its mark (Rev. 20:4). Only after that lengthy description, presumably of the martyrs or believers in general, does John say that they are the ones who came to life and reigned for the thousand years. Once again, the temporal order of events seems to be reversed. Logically, the event that preceded the assumption of duties and privileges by the saints/martyrs is their resurrection. This first resurrection then occurs at the beginning of the millennium at the time of the second coming. This is verified by Rev. 20:6, which stipulates that those who participate in this first resurrection are both “blessed and holy” and that the second death will have no power over them.

John leaves some questions unanswered. Are those who are resurrected only the martyrs or all the believers who died “in Christ”? The immediate context seems to suggest the former.<sup>722</sup> They are described as “souls of the beheaded” and those “who did not worship the beast” or “took his mark”. The false prophet has the authority to kill those who refused to worship the beast (Rev. 13:15).<sup>723</sup> However, Revelation does not actually speak of a universal martyrdom and Rev. 2:25; 3:11 seem to suggest that believers will be alive at the Parousia.<sup>724</sup> It is natural to expect that these living believers join the martyrs. There is another problem with the theory that only martyrs participate in the first resurrection. Those who expect this propose that the remaining saints take part in the second resurrection.<sup>725</sup> Krodel observes that such a scenario would be devastating for John’s faithful audience who lost loved ones without suffering martyrdom and could only expect to see them again at the end of the millennium. It would be very unlikely that those who died faithfully but not due to martyrdom would be in the same group as the rest of humanity waiting for another thousand years after the Parousia for their resurrection.<sup>726</sup>

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<sup>722</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 360; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 246. Although as we noted in chapter 6 the text can also be interpreted as allowing for others as well as the martyrs seated on the thrones.

<sup>723</sup> So Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 355. According to Mounce “there are none who resist the Antichrist without paying for their stand with their lives.” Others who see this group as comprising only martyrs are Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: Power of Apocalypse*, 1<sup>st</sup>. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1984), 128-29; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084.

<sup>724</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 707 n.15.

<sup>725</sup> See for example Caird, *The Revelation*, 290.

<sup>726</sup> Krodel, *Revelation*, 334.

As an alternative, other commentators<sup>727</sup> understand this resurrection to include all the dead saints.<sup>728</sup> This second view has merit since the participants of this first resurrection are called “blessed and holy” (μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος) and it is stipulated that the “second death” has no power over them (Rev. 20:6). The designation blessed (μακάριος) in Revelation is not given only to martyrs but primarily to the saints (Rev. 1:3; 16:15; 19:9; 22:7; 22:14). Likewise, ἅγιοι (saints) is not a title of martyrs alone but of all God’s people (e.g., Rev. 11:18).<sup>729</sup> In addition, in Rev. 20:6 those who participate in the first resurrection are said to become priests of God and Christ and reign with him for the thousand years. In other passages of Revelation, the privilege of being priests of God is promised to all the believers not only to the martyrs (Rev. 1:6). Likewise, reigning is the promise to the redeemed in Rev. 5:9-10 and to God’s servants in Rev. 22:3-5. Koester also notes that the Laodicean believers who conquer by remaining faithful will be seated with Christ on his throne (Rev. 3:21).<sup>730</sup> Reigning is not an exclusive benefit of martyrdom in Revelation.

According to Rev. 20:6, the second death has no authority over the participants in the first resurrection (ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν). If only the martyrs are invulnerable from the power of the second death, the assumption is that the second death has power over the rest of the saints who have not suffered martyrdom. The first death is that which “all men except those living at the Parousia experience.”<sup>731</sup> The second death is the eternal death in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).<sup>732</sup> It is unthinkable to suggest that John expected the saints who had not suffered martyrdom to undergo the second death, which is equated with the experience in the lake of fire—the fate of Satan, the beast, the false prophet as well as the fate of those whose names have not been found in the book of life (Rev. 19:20; 20:10; 15).<sup>733</sup>

The immediate context of the millennium also suggests that more than the martyrs are included in the millennial reign. In Rev. 20:9 after his release, Satan and his armies encircle the camp of the saints (τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων). Kroll points out that this group is not

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<sup>727</sup> Most commentators according to Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084.

<sup>728</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 262; Ford, *Revelation*, 351; Wall, *Revelation*, 238; Roloff, *Revelation*, 227; Osborne, *Revelation*, 708; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 578; Koester, *Revelation*, 774-75.

<sup>729</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 446; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 232.

<sup>730</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 771.

<sup>731</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 268.

<sup>732</sup> Morris, *The Revelation of St. John*, 242.

<sup>733</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 707-8.

designated as former martyrs but as saints and concludes that the saints in Revelation cannot be restricted to martyrs only.<sup>734</sup>

Last, it is more likely that two similar events, such as two resurrections, will distinguish two opposing classes of humanity from each other, rather than differentiate between martyrs on the one hand (first resurrection) and dead saints along with the dead wicked on the other (second resurrection). Rev. 20 has strong judicial overtones (see Rev. 20:4, 11-15). The primary purpose of judgement is to divide the saints and the wicked, not to split the believers into distinct classes (i.e., martyrs and saints) and in the process produce a confusing mixed class of believers and unbelievers. The sequence I have advocated here for the two resurrections, first that of the saints and then that of the wicked is in harmony with John's practice of giving priority to the saints over the wicked, as was pointed out in the two harvests of Rev. 14:14-16, 17-20, and the two banquets of Rev. 19:1-9, 11-21.<sup>735</sup> It is also supported by the Johannine tradition in John 5:29 where Jesus speaks of two resurrections; of life and of condemnation.

It is best therefore to understand Rev. 20:4 as relating that John saw the saints (possibly also angels and the twenty-four elders)<sup>736</sup> seated on thrones and also (translating the fourth *καί* of Rev. 20:4 as "also" or "even") including the martyrs.<sup>737</sup> John's point is not that even the martyrs are included in the sense that they are the least worthy. Rather, John makes the point that even those who were executed will not miss that reward because of their death but will be resurrected. In other words, John is probably addressing a similar concern to that Paul addressed in 1 Thess. 4:15. Paul's passage seems to refer to a worry of the Thessalonian church that "those who were still alive at Christ's return might 'precede' and so enjoy some kind of temporal advantage over the believers who had already died."<sup>738</sup> In like manner here, John probably affirms that the dead martyrs will not miss out but will also be included in the blessings of the millennium. The inclusion of the martyrs in the text gives John the opportunity to speak explicitly of the resurrection of believers for the first time.

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<sup>734</sup> Krodell, *Revelation*, 334.

<sup>735</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>736</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 996.

<sup>737</sup> Likewise, the NRSV and the ESV translates the *καί* as also.

<sup>738</sup> Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 323.

The conclusion that the first resurrection is that of all the saints comes naturally. The point is not that all saints suffered martyrdom but rather that John “saw faithfulness even to the death as the essence of the Christian life.”<sup>739</sup>

## 7.2 The second resurrection

While John explains the first resurrection, he interjects a parenthesis<sup>740</sup> that foretells another resurrection that will take place a thousand years later; the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5a). Since it was established that the saints participate in the first resurrection, this second resurrection “includes the dead who remain outside the salvation community”.<sup>741</sup> John eschews using the term resurrection (*ἀνάστασις*) specifically for this group.<sup>742</sup> He uses the phrase “did not live (*οὐκ ἔζησαν*) until the thousand years were fulfilled”. Ironically, John describes their return to life by literally saying “they did not live...”. The way John foretells their future return to existence prepares the reader not to anticipate a meaningful life for those who participate in this resurrection. It also confirms the fact that the unbelievers were dead for the duration of the thousand years. It is no wonder then that no conversion or repentance is described in these passages. The wicked dead remained dead and did not come to life “until the thousand years were fulfilled.”

The resurrected nations follow Satan readily and blindly. There is no indication that Satan devises any elaborate deception to gain them as followers. In the past, he had to offer signs such as sending fire from heaven (Rev. 13:13-14), giving breath to an image so that the image would talk (Rev. 13:15), or coercing the worship of the inhabitants of the earth by means of economic sanctions (Rev. 13:17).<sup>743</sup> Before the battle of Armageddon, the dragon and his allies spew out of their mouths three unclean frog-like spirits to perform signs that will deceive the kings of the inhabited world and gather them to battle (Rev. 16:14).<sup>744</sup> No such elaborate deception is described in Rev. 20:8 because apparently none is needed. All are under his sway and there is no evidence that anyone can escape.

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<sup>739</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 204.

<sup>740</sup> So Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1090.

<sup>741</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 228; Koester, *Revelation*, 774-75.

<sup>742</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 239; Roloff, *Revelation*, 228.

<sup>743</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 184-86.

<sup>744</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 833.

The brief description of the deception may have several implications. With regard to Satan, it is clear that even after a thousand years of imprisonment he has not changed at all. He was and continues to be the deceiver. Satan's release from his prison may have suggested to John's readers mercy from God not dissimilar from the clemency military victors displayed to their captive foes. Instead of displaying remorse or change in his behaviour, Satan continues in his previous evil ways. It becomes evident then that the only way he can be dealt with is by removing him permanently.<sup>745</sup>

Likewise, the nations do not exhibit any sign that they have changed at all. Their last act in life prior to the thousand years was a war against God (Rev. 16:12-21; 17:13-14; 19:11-21). Now that they return to life, they once more take up arms against God. Just as Satan does not change after a thousand years of imprisonment, neither that "nor the waywardness of the human heart will be altered by the mere passing of time."<sup>746</sup> There is no dissenting voice among the nations; in unison they fall in line behind Satan in his final war against God. If the reader was to discern an evolution in the way the nations respond and relate to God, he or she would have to conclude that the nations regress steadily. Despite the repeated judgements, the nations failed to repent. Satan's final deception is not even described as an elaborate scheme. It may not be unfair to conclude that the nations want to be deceived.

Perhaps even more significant is that God does not even try to win back any of the nations. In the past, through judgements, plagues, or warnings God attempted to bring the world to repentance (e.g., Rev. 14:6-13; 16:1-21).<sup>747</sup> No such attempt is described after the millennium. This is why the fate of the nations perhaps appears to be all but sealed. Even after experiencing the punishment of death, the nations seem incapable of returning to God. Worse still, God does not seem to be interested in their return. Theirs is not a story of repentance but one of rebellion and punishment.

### 7.3 The last war

The explicit purpose of this last deception is to gather the nations for a war against God and his saints (Rev. 20:8). Those scholars who adhere to amillennialism claim that this war is identical

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<sup>745</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 776.

<sup>746</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 361.

<sup>747</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 278. Bauckham makes the case for the need for a call to repentance by God and his servants besides the judgements.



to that of Rev. 19:11-21 and 16:14, where the identical phrase “to gather them for war” (συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον) is encountered. However, the first battle was led by the beast (Rev. 19:19), whereas in this one Satan leads the wicked armies (Rev. 20:7-9).<sup>748</sup> In the first battle, the beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20); in this last battle it is Satan’s turn to join them there (Rev. 20:10).<sup>749</sup> The previous battle was fought with the sword from the mouth of Christ (Rev. 19:21), whereas in this second battle the wicked are destroyed by fire (Rev. 20:9).<sup>750</sup> Last, the previous battle was fought by the living wicked inhabitants of the earth and their kings (Rev. 16:14; 19:15, 19) without any hint of participation from the wicked resurrected dead. This last battle is fought entirely by resurrected armies that ascend from the four corners of the earth, probably from Hades itself.<sup>751</sup> John claims in Rev. 20:7 that the preparations for this battle take place “when the thousand years are fulfilled” (ὅταν τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη), which is precisely the time that he said the rest of the dead (i.e., the wicked) will rise: “the rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were fulfilled” (οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη). The second resurrection has provided Satan with new soldiers to fight his last battle. As Osborne observes, the two battles share sufficient differences “to warrant the view of a second battle rather than a recapitulation of the first.”<sup>752</sup>

### 7.3.1 The prophetic background behind Rev. 20:8-9

The notion that the nations will be gathered in battle against Israel is a common theme of the HB. Joel speaks of a day when the Lord will restore the people of Judah from captivity (ἐπιστρέψω τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν Ἰουδα) and will then gather the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat for their judgement (Joel 4:1-2 LXX ref.).<sup>753</sup> God taunts the nations to rouse their warriors, arm them, and gather them to attack (Joel 4:9-11 LXX ref.). Since this war is to be critical, the nations are exhorted to gather up all their resources.<sup>754</sup> They are told specifically to surround (κυκλόθεν, Joel 4:11, LXX ref.) Israel, which is exactly what Satan’s army do to the camp of the saints in Rev. 20:9 (ἐκύκλευσαν τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων: they surrounded the

<sup>748</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 778.

<sup>749</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 363.

<sup>750</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 713.

<sup>751</sup> See chapter 5.4.1.

<sup>752</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 713.

<sup>753</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 300.

<sup>754</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, 10:149.

encampment of the saints). God's judgement is ruthless and is portrayed as the trampling of the grapes in the winepress (Joel 4:13 LXX).

Micah also describes the nations gathering to wage war against Zion (Micah 4:11). Like Joel, the war passage follows the restoration of Israel, and the prophecy is temporally located in the last days (Micah 4:1) which denotes the messianic era.<sup>755</sup> Once again, the Lord is the one who gathers the nations that attack Jerusalem in an attempt to defile her (Micah 4:11). What the nations fail to understand though is that the Lord has been gathering them as sheaves on the threshing floor to be crushed (Micah 4:12).<sup>756</sup> Just like Joel, the Lord summons the nations to their doom, but in Micah the daughter of Zion equipped with "horns of iron" and "hoofs of bronze" (κέρατα ... σιδηρᾶ καὶ ... ὀπλάς ... χαλκᾶς, Micah 4:13) will trample down her enemies.<sup>757</sup>

Zechariah also includes the story of Jerusalem's siege by the nations in Zech. 14. As in the previous examples, the Lord gathers the nations to come to Jerusalem to fight against her (Zech. 14:2). Zechariah's account is unique in that he alone predicts that Jerusalem will be breached, ransacked and some of its inhabitants taken into captivity (Zech. 14:2). However, the prophet turns the initial defeat into victory when the Lord comes to rescue his people. According to Zechariah, the Lord will descend on the mount of Olives and the mountain will be split from east to west to form a valley so that God's people will be able to flee their enemies. The imagery is similar to the parting of the Red Sea that allowed the Israelites to flee from the pursuing Egyptian army.<sup>758</sup> The coming of the Lord will transform both nature and the city of Jerusalem. The effects on nature are described as acts that reverse God's creation (e.g., Zech. 14:6 LXX ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ οὐκ ἔσται φῶς... cf. Gen 1:3-5)<sup>759</sup> but at the same time create "living waters" from Jerusalem that bring forth fertility to bless the whole earth.<sup>760</sup> The day of the Lord according to Zech. 14 destroys and then recreates the world.<sup>761</sup>

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<sup>755</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, 10:309.

<sup>756</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 300.

<sup>757</sup> The image is violent and may not simply allude to a female animal threshing by trampling the sheaves. Some have suggested that it evokes Egyptian battle scenes that depict cows and bulls trampling the enemies underfoot. Julia M. O'Brien, *Micah*, Wisdom Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 50.

<sup>758</sup> Marvin A. Sweeney, *Berit Olam: The Twelve Prophets*, vol. 2 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2016), 332.

<sup>759</sup> Sweeney, *Berit Olam* 2:333.

<sup>760</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 308; Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:333.

<sup>761</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 307-8.

God's sovereignty over the world is described in Zech. 14:9, which clearly alludes to the Shema.<sup>762</sup> "And the LORD will become king over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one and his name one" (NRSV). Jerusalem will be made secure and all the aggressor nations will be destroyed (Zech. 14:11-15). Zechariah describes three ways this will happen. First, the nations are afflicted by a terrible plague (Zech. 14:12). Second, the Lord will create confusion and panic that will lead the nations to attack each other (Zech. 14:13). Last, Judah will also participate in the fight to destroy the nations.<sup>763</sup> Despite these devastating attacks there will be survivors from the nations who will come to Jerusalem to demonstrate their submission to the Lord (Zech. 14:16). The word "worship" in that verse probably does not denote the conversion of the nations to the worship of the Lord but simply "to bow down or to do obeisance."<sup>764</sup> Likewise, the infinitive *προσκυνῆσαι* in the LXX may refer not merely to worship but to an act of obeisance.<sup>765</sup> This is evident from the rest of the passage, which describes possible repercussions against the nations that will not comply and will choose to rebel (Zech. 14:18-19).<sup>766</sup>

Zechariah's account reveals an interest in naming key places of the topography of Israel and Jerusalem (Zech. 14:10-11). According to Zechariah all the land will become flat like Arabah,<sup>767</sup> from Geba to Rimmon. Geba here represents the northernmost part of Judah (2 Kgs. 23:8), whereas Rimmon was located to the far south (Josh. 15:32; 19:7).<sup>768</sup> Likewise, Zechariah claims that Jerusalem will be raised and describes several border landmarks of the city such as Benjamin's gate at the northeast, the Corner gate at the northwest, the First or Former gate at the east, and the royal winepresses probably located in the extreme south of the city.<sup>769</sup> The various topographical names reveal the effort of the prophet to encompass all areas of

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<sup>762</sup> Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:334; Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 310.

<sup>763</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, 10:623.

<sup>764</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 316.

<sup>765</sup> LSJ, s.v. "προσκυνέω."

<sup>766</sup> John J. Collins, *Joel, Obadiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 56.

<sup>767</sup> Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:334.

<sup>768</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 311.

<sup>769</sup> Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:334-35; Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 312.

Jerusalem.<sup>770</sup> It is also apparent that the prophet roots the fulfilment of his prophecy in the actual history and topography of Israel.<sup>771</sup>

Zechariah's account of the siege of Jerusalem offers more details than Joel and Micah. Zechariah also includes some themes borrowed by John in Revelation. The living waters that flow from Jerusalem and are poured to the east, and the western sea<sup>772</sup> resembles the river of life that flows from God's throne from the new Jerusalem (Zech. 14:8 cf. Rev. 22:1-2). The nation's pilgrimage to Jerusalem to pay homage to God also resembles the nations that bring their glory to God in the new Jerusalem (Zech. 14:16-19 cf. Rev. 21:24-26). Last, both accounts emphasize the purity of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:20-21 cf. Rev. 21:8, 27; 22:15).

The most elaborate and fullest account of the nations besieging Jerusalem comes from the prophecy against Gog in Ezek. 38-39, part of the restoration oracles of chapters 34-48 that describe the distant future when the fate of Israel will change for the better.<sup>773</sup> Two passages that contain expressions such as "after many days... in the later years" (Ezek. 18:8) and "on that day..." (Ezek. 18:18) project this prophecy to the eschaton.<sup>774</sup> The context of the chapter is after the prophecy in the valley of the dry bones recounted in Ezek. 37 and therefore after Israel's restoration.<sup>775</sup> Just like the other prophets, Ezekiel too envisions God as the one who stirs the enemy into battle against Israel (Ezek. 38:4, 16).<sup>776</sup> The purpose of the attack is so that Gog and his armies will enrich themselves by preying on the unarmed and unprotected Israel (Ezek. 38:10-13).<sup>777</sup> God, however, will bring judgement on Gog with pestilence, bloodshed, torrential rains, hailstones, fire and sulphur (Ezek. 38:22). The fiery element in the judgement is repeated in Ezek. 39:6 in which God threatens to send fire on Magog, the land of Gog. The

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<sup>770</sup> Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:335.

<sup>771</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 312.

<sup>772</sup> This is the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean. Mark J. Boda, *Haggai, Zechariah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 526.

<sup>773</sup> Block, "Gog and Magog," 96.

<sup>774</sup> Block, "Gog and Magog," 103.

<sup>775</sup> Corrine L. Carvalho and Paul Niskanen, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 34.

<sup>776</sup> It is not clear who Gog or what his land the Magog is. Some identify Gog with Gyges of Lydia whose kingdom was situated in Asia Minor in the seventh century. Henry McKeating, *Ezekiel* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 115. Gyges appears in the Assyrian annals as Gugu. Even if Gog is a reference to that historical person, Gyges "seems already to have become legendary before the period of Judah's exile." McKeating, 115. This character was probably chosen because he was foreign and mysterious, coming from the threatening North where strange and unknown people lived. McKeating, 116.

<sup>777</sup> Odell, *Ezekiel*, 471; Carvalho and Niskanen, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, 34.

implication is that not only will the invading armies of Gog be destroyed but also those who have been left back home in places considered safe.<sup>778</sup>

The outcome of the battle is the reversal of fates. Those who came to plunder the peaceful will end up being plundered.<sup>779</sup> The weapons of the fallen enemies will be used for fuel by Israel for seven years (Ezek. 39:9). The valley towards the east sea (the Dead Sea) will become full of corpses (Ezek. 39:11). However, these bones will have no hope of resurrection unlike the bones of Ezek. 37.<sup>780</sup> All the gravediggers of Israel will work for seven months in order to bury the defeated dead and cleanse the land (Ezek. 39:12). Since the dead are so numerous, the Lord called the prophet to summon the wild beasts and the carrion-feeding birds to assist in the cleansing by eating the flesh of the defeated enemies (Ezek. 39:17-20 cf. Rev. 19:17-18; 21). The location of the battle appears to be the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 39:4).

Gog's struggle against Israel in Ezekiel is not a universal battle. The ravaging results of the war do not affect the remainder of humanity. Nations are left after the battle that are probably spectators of this conflict. God's display of power is partly for their benefit. He intends to demonstrate his glory and judgement (Ezek. 39:21).<sup>781</sup> God's wrath will also show the nations that the reason Israel went into captivity was not God's lack of power to defend her but Israel's sin and unfaithfulness (Ezek. 39:23). Thus, Ezekiel vindicates God's choice to punish Israel in the past as well as his decision to judge the nations that will attack his people in the future.

Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog is perhaps the one that shares most with Revelation. First, both prophets use the names Gog and Magog. The rarity of these names in Jewish apocalyptic literature further emphasizes the relation between the two passages.<sup>782</sup> Second, John borrows the gruesome imagery of the carrion-feeding birds feasting on the defeated foes of the Divine Warrior from this prophecy (Rev. 19:17-18, 21). Third, Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog appears to be the only one that uses the medium of fire to destroy the wicked (Ezek. 39:6) although in fairness Ezekiel also includes earthquakes, swords, plagues, bloodshed, torrential rain, hailstones and burning sulphur as means of punishment and killing the armies of Gog (Ezek. 38:19, 21-22).

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<sup>778</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel, Daniel*, 9:337.

<sup>779</sup> Odell, *Ezekiel*, 474.

<sup>780</sup> Carvalho and Niskanen, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, 34.

<sup>781</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel, Daniel*, 9:340.

<sup>782</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1104.

These prophetic accounts of the attack on Jerusalem share many similarities with Revelation but also have some differences, the most fundamental being that in Revelation Satan gathers the nations to attack the camp of the saints not the Lord as in all the HB prophetic passages we have studied (Rev. 20:8 cf. Ezek. 38:4, 16; Joel 4:2 LXX ref; Micah 4:12; Zech. 14:2).

Revelation also lacks specific local topographical details concerning the battle between Gog and the saints. The battlefield for John is probably the whole earth (Rev. 20:8), not a specific place. The saints are said to be an encampment (παρεμβολή, Rev.20:9), a designation used for the temporary settlements of the Jews while wandering in the desert.<sup>783</sup> Even though the camp of the saints is clearly the new Jerusalem, John avoids using that name and instead calls her “the beloved city” (Rev. 20:9). In doing so, John entirely removes all possible geographical details that would anchor this prophecy to a specific place on earth. In contrast, the HB prophets specifically talk about Israel, Jerusalem and its topography. Ezekiel speaks of Israel’s mountains and its towns (Ezek. 38:8; 39:9), the valley of Hamon-Gog (Ezek. 39:15)<sup>784</sup> as well as mentioning particular trading towns that are not mythical such as Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish (Ezek. 38:13). Joel also includes the valley of Jehoshaphat and Jerusalem (Joel 3:1-2) and Micah mentions Mount Zion (Micah 4:1-2; 11-13). Last, Zechariah contains the most topographical detail of Judah and Jerusalem (Zech. 14:10-11).<sup>785</sup> While the prophets try to localize and root their prophecies in history, John universalizes and allows his prophecy to take on cosmic dimensions. Even though John employs the names Gog and Magog in Revelation, like Ezekiel, these names are probably used because of the air of mystery that surrounds them, not as specific names of nations.<sup>786</sup> Furthermore, for Ezekiel Gog is a king whose land is Magog (the word means the land of Gog).<sup>787</sup> John on the other hand lists the names Gog and Magog as metonyms for the nations of the whole earth.<sup>788</sup> This means that even though John borrowed these names he changed them to serve his own purposes.

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<sup>783</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 778, 789.

<sup>784</sup> This is probably an allusion to the valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem. Odell, *Ezekiel*, 475.

<sup>785</sup> As noted previously, these include Geba and Rimmon, the Benjamin Gate, the Former (or First) Gate, the Corner Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Royal winepress. Sweeney, *Berit Olam*, 2:334-35.

<sup>786</sup> Ezekiel probably used these names for the same reason. McKeating, *Ezekiel*, 116.

<sup>787</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 711-12.

<sup>788</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 140-42.

John's description of the nations' attack on the saints after the millennium not only breaks through the common topographical locations, it also transcends the temporal boundaries of history. Admittedly, the prophetic accounts are also envisioned as taking place at the eschaton, but John's description appears to be after that—after the return of Christ. In order for the final attack to be facilitated against the saints, the nations need to be resurrected and return from their graves. For the prophets, since the attack of the nations comes at the culmination of earth's history, the attack is part of it. In Rev. 20, the attack of the nations takes place a thousand years after the end of history.

In conclusion, John undeniably models this last attack of the evil forces against the saints on themes he borrowed from Hebrew prophets. These prophets agreed on the notion that Jerusalem would be attacked at the end of history but would be delivered by the Lord. Not all the details of the prophecies agree completely with each other. The prophets seem not to agree on the exact means by which the Lord would destroy the attacking enemies, nor even whether Jerusalem would be breached by the nations in their final assault. It was apparently acceptable for the prophets to present their own variations of the course of events. It was not therefore unprecedented for John to modify these scenarios to suit his own purposes. John, as a fellow servant of the prophets (Rev. 22:9) felt he had the same authority to depict the end of the world in his own style.

## 7.4 The battle

The gathered nations are said to be “like the sand of the sea” (ὡς ἡ ἄμμος τῆς θαλάσσης, Rev. 20:8). In Rev. 12:18, the dragon also stands on the “sand of the seashore” (ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης) as he expects his ally the beast to rise from the sea (Rev. 13:1).<sup>789</sup> The expression there however is used differently, emphasizing the proximity to the sea from whence the beast ascends, and probably is not a reference to the multitude of Satan's allies. The same expression, employed in the same way, is found repeatedly in the HB, used in several passages to describe vast armies attacking Israel (Josh. 11:4; Jdgs. 7:12; 1 Sam. 13:5).<sup>790</sup>

The expression is also used to describe the descendants of Abraham (Gen. 22:17; 28:14; 32:13). Once again, the meaning is the same, illustrating the multitude of Abraham's

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<sup>789</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 135-36.

<sup>790</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 778.

descendants. It is possible that John intends to depict here a parody of the promise to Abraham whose offspring was said to be as numerous as the sand-grains on the seashore (Gen. 22:17).<sup>791</sup> If this is correct, then the nations are portrayed here as Satan's inheritance or reward. His inheritance though is to be short-lived, and his reward devoured.

Unlike the previous battle with the Divine Warrior, John here describes the particular plan this Satanic army employed. They "surrounded the camp of the saints" (ἐκύκλευσαν τὴν παρεμβολὴν τῶν ἁγίων, Rev. 20:9). Surrounding enemy armies was a sound ancient military strategy.<sup>792</sup> The besieged armies were prevented from fleeing or being resupplied and the aggressors were simultaneously able to launch an attack from all sides.<sup>793</sup>

The details concerning the attacking army (nations from Gog and Magog), its strategy (surrounding the saints), its large numbers (like the sand on the seashore), and its marching on the expanse of the earth, stand in contrast to the brevity of the account of the actual battle. John simply states that "fire came from heaven and devoured them" (κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτούς, Rev. 20:9). This frugal description implies that despite their numbers, the nations never stood a chance of defeating the saints. This was not to be an exciting climax between two battling armies, but the swift annihilation of the wicked.

Ezekiel's account of the destruction of Gog mentions fire coming down from heaven, but Rev. 20:9 probably does not allude specifically to it.<sup>794</sup> Fire as a means of destruction appears alongside other calamities that befall the nations. In Ezek. 38:22 (LXX), the prophet claims that "I will rain fire and sulphur on him and on those that are with him and on many nations that are with him" (πῦρ καὶ θεῖον βρέξω ἐπ' αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπ' ἔθνη πολλὰ μετ' αὐτοῦ). Later in Ezek. 39:6, the Lord declares that he will "send fire on Gog" (ἀποστελῶ πῦρ ἐπὶ Γωγ). Even though the idea is comparable, the wording is not. In Ezek. 38:22, God rains fire (βρέξω) and in Ezek. 39:6 sends fire (ἀποστελῶ). In Rev. 20:9, fire came down (κατέβη) from heaven. In both cases in Ezekiel, since God is doing the talking, the speech is in the first person, whereas in Rev. 20:9 John narrates the event using the third person. The effects of the fire on the nations in Ezekiel are not described. Ezekiel does not say that the

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<sup>791</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 579; Sweet, *Revelation*, 291.

<sup>792</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 714.

<sup>793</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 778.

<sup>794</sup> Contra White, "Making Sense," 543. White underlines the nations' destruction by fire in Ezekiel 38-39 in order to demonstrate parallelism with Rev. 20:8-9. The point is not that Rev. 20:7-10 does not allude to Ezek. 38-39, but that John borrows the destruction by fire in particular from elsewhere.



nations are devoured or that they were burned up. In fact, the context implies that the corpses of the nations remain for Israel's gravediggers to bury or the carrion-feeding birds to eat (Ezek. 39:12, 17-20). In contrast, Rev. 20:9 claims that the fire "devoured" (κατέφαγεν) the nations. This variation may not be accidental. It appears that John clears away all the remnants of sin after the millennium as he anticipates the coming of the new creation.

The destruction of the evil forces in Rev. 20:9 is modelled on 2 Kgs. 1:10-14.<sup>795</sup> The latter passage describes Elijah's experience as he faced three captains and their companies successively sent by king Ahaziah to arrest him. The passage relates that "fire came down from heaven and devoured him [one of the captains] and his fifty [men]" (καὶ κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτὸν καὶ τοὺς πεντήκοντα αὐτοῦ, 2 Kgs. 1:10, 12). This is nearly identical to Rev. 20:9, which reads "and fire came down from heaven and devoured them" (καὶ κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτούς).

Whereas the nations are devoured by fire that comes from heaven, the devil faces a different fate. He is thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet are already being tormented day and night. Fire is central to both punishments but whereas the punishment of the wicked nations is best understood as annihilation since fire devours them, the description of the devil, the beast and the false prophet suggests eternal torment.

It was previously noted that after their descent into the lake of fire the beast and the false prophet no longer affect the plot of Revelation.<sup>796</sup> They are mentioned in Rev. 20:10, but only in order to assure the readers that the devil shares the same fate as they do. After the devil is thrown into the lake of fire, his role in the story is over. The devil never appears again, not even in the final account of the last judgement in Rev. 20:11-15. His confinement in the lake of fire signifies the end of his deceptive career. His punishment is not only confined to this age but also for the age to come. This is probably the significance of the phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων in Rev. 20:10. The two "ages" mentioned here represent this age and the age to come.

Later in Rev. 20:14, John equates the lake of fire with the second death.<sup>797</sup> Interestingly enough, the second death also suggests a punishment not in this age but the age to come. *Tg. Jer.* 51:40, 57 claims that death deprives a person of life in this age, but the second death

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<sup>795</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1027.

<sup>796</sup> See chapter 3.3.

<sup>797</sup> The expression second death will be explored further in chapter 8.4.

deprives a person's life from the age to come.<sup>798</sup> A similar conclusion comes from the *Tg. Deut.* 33:6. In the Babylonian Talmud, Deut. 33:6 is understood as a proof of the resurrection of the dead. "Rabha said: Resurrection is hinted at in the Torah in [Deut. xxxiii. 6]: "May Reuben live, and not die"--which means that he may live in this world, and not die in the world to come."<sup>799</sup> The *Tg. Deut.* 33:6 takes the phrase "to die" of Deut. 33:6 to be a reference to the second death: "Let Reuben live in eternal life and die not the second death".<sup>800</sup> The devil's plummeting into the lake of fire and the notion of the second death both seem to suggest that his punishment is eternal and, more significantly, his return impossible.

## 7.5 The judgement before the great white throne.

Mealy acknowledges that Rev. 20:11-15 can be construed as a recapitulation of the Parousia.<sup>801</sup> After all, it was argued in previous chapters that creation was dissolved at the Parousia and Rev. 20:11 describes the fleeing of earth and heaven from his face (οὗ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου ἔφυγεν ἡ γῆ καὶ ὁ οὐρανός).<sup>802</sup> However, Mealy convincingly refutes this view because John does not use relative clauses to convey action in the narrative except for description.<sup>803</sup> This means that the secondary clause here may not depict an event taking place at this point in time (that is, at the appearance of the white throne, like the NIV) but is a reference to something that happened in the past, possibly at the Parousia already described in Rev. 19:11-21.<sup>804</sup> It is very unlikely that Rev. 20:11-15 refers to the Parousia of Christ since Christ is completely absent from the

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<sup>798</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 781.

<sup>799</sup> *Sanh. 92a*. Michael L. Rodkinson, trans., *The Babylonian Talmud*, vol. 8 (Boston MA: Talmud Society, 1918), 275.

<sup>800</sup> Martin McNamara, *The New Testament and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch*, *Analecta Biblica* 27A (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978), 121.

<sup>801</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 162.

<sup>802</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 164.

<sup>803</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 165-66. For example, Mealy cites Rev. 13:12 τὸ θηρίον τὸ πρῶτον, οὗ ἐθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ (the first beast whose mortal wound was healed). The "healed wound" describes the beast; it did not occur at this stage in the narrative. According to Mealy, in over 80 cases John's relative pronouns in the narrative portion of Revelation point "backward (or forward) to salient actions or features encountered elsewhere in the text." Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 165.

<sup>804</sup> Lattimore's translation reads: "And I saw a throne, great, white, and sitting upon it was he from whose face the earth and sky fled, and no place was found for them". Richmond Lattimore, *The Four Gospels and the Revelation* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 284. Ladd also argues that this statement adverts to previous events, specifically to the opening of the sixth seal. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 271.

narrative.<sup>805</sup> Notably, Christ is absent from the final battle between the devil and the saints in Rev. 20:7-10.

It was observed at the beginning of this chapter that John envisions two resurrections. The dead believers are raised first at the beginning of the millennium, whereas at the end of the millennium a resurrection for the wicked takes place. The description of a resurrection during the judgement scene before the white throne in Rev. 20:11-15 challenges our proposed theory on two levels. First, did John really describe a resurrection in Rev. 20:7-9? A linear reading of the two passages (Rev. 20:7-10 and 20:11-15) would in that case suggest that John expected three resurrections for which the text provides no evidence. And second, is the second resurrection an event during which only the wicked are raised (as we argued), or the occasion for all the dead (with the exception of the martyrs) to come to life? The hypothetical clause in Rev. 20:15 seems to allow for the presence of believers in this resurrection and therefore goes against the views advanced earlier in this study.

The first challenge is valid only if the two passages are read as consecutive narratives. If the judgement before the white throne (Rev. 20:11-15) is a recapitulation of the final war describing the defeat of Satan (Rev. 20:7-10), John's numbering of the resurrections presents no problem for our interpretation. There are several reasons why this is so. As Mealy explains, there are no more expectations for the reader to entertain at the threshold of Rev. 20:11-15 for an advancement on the battle between good and evil.<sup>806</sup> All loose ends have been tied up. Satan's trinity is confined in the lake of fire, and the unrepented nations have been devoured by fire. Thus, it makes no sense to add yet another resurrection after Rev. 20:10.

The multiple punishments of the wicked in the final chapters of Revelation are often explained as sentences imposed on the wicked, living and dead. We saw in chapter 3 that in Rev. 19:11-21 the rider on the white horse punishes the wicked who have been gathered by the beast, the false prophet and the dragon to make war against him. It was argued that this was the punishment on the *living* wicked. It was argued in chapter 5 that a resurrection occurs at the end of the millennium in Rev. 20:7-9 in which the wicked dead participate. The fire that came down from heaven at the end of the millennium signifies the punishment of the *dead* wicked. Once again, this demonstrates that all wicked, living and dead, have received their deserts. There is

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<sup>805</sup> So Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1101. "...the absence of any mention of the Lamb in this judgment scene is striking". Similarly, Koester claims that "...Christ's role is implicit at best." Koester, *Revelation*, 779.

<sup>806</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 142.

no other class of the wicked available for punishment. A third additional punishment is redundant in the plot of Revelation.

Structural similarities between the two passages (Rev. 20:9-10; 11-15) also point to their being a recapitulation of each other. Both passages begin with a resurrection and end with a reference to the lake of fire. In chapter 5, we noted at least four reasons why a resurrection is described in Rev. 20:7-9.<sup>807</sup> In Rev. 20:13, John explicitly refers to a resurrection. In Rev. 20:9, the wicked are being destroyed by fire from heaven and Satan is thrown in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). Rev. 20:15 also ends with the wicked thrown into the lake of fire. Shea notes the similarities between the two passages, stating that “[t]o some extent, therefore, the final two scenes of this chapter go over the same ground twice.”<sup>808</sup> In both passages, God seems responsible for the punishment of the wicked. Fire comes down from heaven in Rev. 20:9, presumably from God.<sup>809</sup> In addition, the guilty verdict of the wicked takes place while God is seated on the white throne presiding over the judgement in Rev. 20:15.

It is relevant to note that the last judgement of Israel’s enemies in Ezekiel 38-39 is also portrayed in two parallel narratives.<sup>810</sup> By including the names of Gog and Magog, John reveals his intention to associate his passages with that of Ezekiel. The prophet in Ezek. 38 describes the conscription of Gog and his allies against the Israelites (Ezek. 38:1-9, their wicked motives (Ezek. 38:10-13), their advance to war (Ezek. 38:14-16) and finally their judgement from God (Ezek. 38:17-22). In the next chapter, Ezekiel again pronounces an oracle of judgement against Gog and the nations who went to war against Israel. The slaughter of Gog takes place on the mountains of Israel (Ezek. 39:4, cf. Ezek. 38:8), and God sends fire on Magog and the coastlands (Ezek. 39:6 cf. Ezek. 38:22). Gog is plundered although he instigated the attack in order to plunder Israel (Ezek. 39:10, cf. Ezek. 38:10-13). Finally, both accounts end with the

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<sup>807</sup> First, it is the timing. John promises in Rev. 20:5 that the rest of the dead will not come to life until the end of the thousand years. Rev. 20:7 is placed after the end of the thousand years. Second, John uses the identical expression to announce the time of the second resurrection as well as the resumption of Satan’s deceptive activities at the end of the thousand years (ἄχρι/ὅταν τελεσθῇ τὰ χίλια ἔτη. Rev. 20:5,7). In the process, John signifies the second resurrection not only temporally but also literally by using a particular phrase. Third, the two dimensions often associated with a trip to the underworld are present. The nations located at the corners of the earth imply a “far away” horizontal trip from the location of the believers. The vertical dimension, up from the underworld, is also manifested in the word ἀνέβησαν describing the ascending course of these people from hades onto the expanse of the earth. And fourth is the allusion that John makes in Rev. 20:9 to Dan. 12:2 which is perhaps the only HB reference to a mass resurrection.

<sup>808</sup> Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure,” 49.

<sup>809</sup> 046 and some minuscules appended the phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ after ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. This addition “appears to be an expansion introduced by the copyist in imitation of 21:2 and 10.” Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 765.

<sup>810</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 187.

nations recognizing Yahweh's justice, holiness, and greatness (Ezek. 38:23 cf. Ezek. 39:23). The conclusive defeat of Gog and his allies in both accounts demonstrates that Ezekiel intended the oracles to complement each other and therefore not describe sequential events. This means that a recapitulation on the judgement of Gog was already among John's sources.

The plot resolution after Rev. 20:10, the numbering of the resurrections and the deaths (two resurrections, two deaths), the clearly parallel themes between the two passages (Rev. 20:7-10; 11-15) as well as the fact that John's HB source portrays the judgement against Gog using two narratives that cover the same event require that we read Rev. 20:11-15 as a recapitulation of Rev. 20:7-10.

The second problem this passage poses to our proposed interpretation of the millennium is the conditional clause in Rev. 20:15. This sentence appears to allow for the possibility of believers participating in this resurrection. Some, like Mealy, resolve the problem by suggesting that Rev. 20:11-15 is a recapitulation not only of Rev. 20:7-10 but also of Rev. 20:4-10.<sup>811</sup> This theory asserts that Rev. 20:11-15 recapitulates both resurrections, so that, if saints are mentioned in Rev. 20:11-15, this does not pose a problem. This theory has some merit. First, it recognizes the necessity of the judgement before the white throne as a recapitulating narrative since all the loose ends of the story have been tied together. Second, it does not violate John's number of resurrections and deaths. Last, it explains the possible presence of the saints in Rev. 20:15.

The problem with any theory that somehow sees the saints being judged, or vindicated before the white throne is that nowhere in the text do we see the positive outcome of that judgement. Mealy seems to admit the scarcity of evidence when he says that the double judgement scene is "very subtly articulated."<sup>812</sup> It is unthinkable for John to include a believers judgement scene while failing to mention their vindication and their reward. Equally puzzling would be for John to include a general judgement scene which emphasizes the wicked. Moreover, it is unlike John to mix the wicked and the saints together in the same passage. As a rule, John separates these two groups into different narratives. For instance, he describes the judgement in terms of two harvests in Rev. 14:14-16 and 17-20, or two suppers; the wedding supper of the Lamb and the gruesome supper of the carrion-eating birds in Rev. 19:1-10 and 11-21. An exception to John's practice of separating the saints from the wicked is found in Rev.

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<sup>811</sup> See Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 179, 181.

<sup>812</sup> Mealy, *After the Thousand Years*, 187.

11:16-18 where both groups are included in one judgement. However, even there, John prioritizes the saints by mentioning them first and specifically stating their reward (δοῦναι τὸν μισθόν, Rev. 11:18).

Lambrecht points out that in Rev. 20:11-15 “attention appears to be given to punitive judgement alone, not to reward and salvation.”<sup>813</sup> It is true that those who are present before the throne are described in the all-encompassing “I saw the dead, the great and the small” (εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικρούς, Rev. 20:12). The last time the phrase was used in Rev. 19:18 was where it described the dead bodies of those who gathered to attack the rider on the white horse. Therefore, John’s point may well be that he saw all the “rest” (i.e., the wicked) dead, not all the dead.<sup>814</sup> Middleton observes that the dead who stand before the throne “are those destined for destruction”, because John has already divided humanity into those whose names are registered in the book of life and those who are not because they are followers of the beast. Since the book of life was completed before the foundation of the world, this division was “always going to be so (cf. Rev. 17:8; 21:27).”<sup>815</sup>

John’s conditional clause “if someone was not found in the book of life...” (Rev. 20:15) appears to suggest that some were found in the book of life, but it does not explicitly say so. It can be argued that this is not meant to imply that believers may take part in this resurrection but that since the fate in the lake of fire is such a terrible outcome, God ensures that only those not found in the book of life will experience it. What the text clearly cannot endorse is the hypothetical vindication of some who repented during the millennium. Those who are judged were clearly dead prior to the judgement (Rev.20:13).

But why would John use repetition? Why did he have to describe the punishment of the wicked twice? Whereas Rev. 20:7-10 portrayed the annihilation of the nations in battle, Rev. 20:11-15 describes their demise after a judicial process. The purpose of the judgement therefore is not that the saints will be separated from the wicked but rather that God’s previous judgement in Rev. 20:9 will be reaffirmed. The court setting reveals that God is not simply vindictive, killing the nations without a trial but also follows judicial procedures before he passes judgement.

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<sup>813</sup> Lambrecht, “Final Judgments and Ultimate Blessings,” 369.

<sup>814</sup> Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina 16 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 203.

<sup>815</sup> Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgement in the Book of Revelation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 185-86.

Furthermore, John wants to demonstrate that God does not simply destroy the wicked as a group, each individual being judged according to his or her works (Rev. 20:12). The court setting in Rev. 20:11-15 is probably taken from Dan. 7:9.<sup>816</sup> Both texts depict the throne of God (θρόνον μέγαν λευκόν, Rev. 20:11; cf. θρόνοι ἐτέθησαν ... ὁ θρόνος ὥσει φλόξ πυρός, Dan. 7:9) and open books that form the basis of the indictment (βιβλία ἡνοίχθησαν, Rev. 20:12 cf. βιβλοι ἡνεώχθησαν, Dan. 7:10). Whereas John chooses not to describe God who sits on the throne at all, emphasizing thus his transcendence, Dan. 7:9 portrays God's clothes being white as snow (ἔχων περιβολὴν ὥσει χιόνα) and the hair of his head as wool white and clear (τρίχωμα τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτοῦ ὥσει ἔριον λευκόν καθαρόν). The basis for this trial is not testimony (μαρτυρία). One of the characteristics of the saints is that they have the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17), which makes them eligible for salvation (see Rev. 20:4). In contrast, the people in Rev. 20:12 are judged according to their documented deeds and the question of whether their names are found in the book of life (Rev. 20:15).<sup>817</sup> Since this passage is a recapitulation of the final attack of the nations on the saints, their last deed is that of an attempt to kill God's people. Naturally, their verdict is unfavourable.

At the conclusion of this judgement, death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14), signifying that their role has ended.<sup>818</sup> Death and Hades are not individuals, they are the personifications of death and the grave, often signifying together the temporary abode of the dead until the final judgement.<sup>819</sup> It is illogical to suggest that concepts such as death suffer torment,<sup>820</sup> a strong indication that the lake of fire is not a place of continuous torment but a place of destruction or elimination.<sup>821</sup> Together with them are thrown all those whose names are not written in the book of life (Rev. 20:15). Since it was argued that this passage is a recapitulation of Rev. 20:7-10, the implication is that those thrown into the lake of fire are the nations that attacked the beloved city, God's people. Thus, it is important to investigate the

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<sup>816</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1031. 1 En. 14:18-25 also describes the heavenly throne in terms similar to Dan. 7:9-10. The two passages probably depend on each other. Christopher C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 255.

<sup>817</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 365-66. The absence of testimony as a basis of judgement may also point to the fact that no saints are being judged in Rev. 20:11-15. Testimony (μαρτυρία) is a forensic word strongly associated with the saints in Revelation (Rev. 1:2; 9; 6:9; 11:7; 12:11, 17; 17:6; 19:10).

<sup>818</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 781.

<sup>819</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 456.

<sup>820</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 213.

<sup>821</sup> Harrington, *Revelation*, 204.

roots and the significance of the lake of fire in Revelation in the next chapter, since if there is no return from the lake of fire, the fate of the nations is sealed at the end of Rev. 20.



## 8. The Lake of Fire

Rev. 20 seems to envision two fates for the wicked. In Rev. 20:7-10, the hostile nations led by the devil against the saints are devoured by fire that comes down from heaven. The passage that follows, Rev. 20:11-15, depicts an apparently different fate for those whose names are not found in the book of life. They are judged before God's throne and are thus thrown into the lake of fire alongside death and Hades. We argued in the previous chapter that these two passages refer to the same future event using different imagery. The first passage is based on a modified HB motif in which the nations go to war and surround God's people in an effort to destroy them. The second employs judicial imagery emphasizing God's justice. In this second passage, *individuals*, not large groups such as nations, receive their judgement.

There is an obvious problem in suggesting that these two passages recapitulate each other when they seem to advocate a different fate for presumably the same people. The first passage claims the nations are annihilated whereas the second portrays them as being tormented for eternity. This is why it is important to study the term lake of fire carefully and determine its original context and meaning for John and his contemporaneous readers. It is also imperative to investigate the significance of the lake of fire for the problem of the fate of the nations, since if these passages recapitulate each other the individuals thrown into the lake comprise the nations of Rev. 20:8. At the end of this study, it will be crucial to determine whether the experience in the lake of fire allows the nations to have a second chance. In other words, is the lake of fire a place similar to purgatory from which people can escape and enter new Jerusalem or is it a place from which there is no return?

John defines the fate in the lake of fire with the equally cryptic term "second death" (Rev 20:14; 21:8).<sup>822</sup> The problem with both is that neither is found in John's favourite treasury of imagery, the HB. In fact, Aune notes that there is no close parallel to the lake of fire in Jewish or Graeco-Roman literature.<sup>823</sup> The term second death is equally rare. It is absent from pre-Christian literature although it does appear in some Greek literature roughly contemporary with John.<sup>824</sup> It will be shown however that its function there is very different and therefore cannot explain the use of the phrase in Revelation.

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<sup>822</sup> The term also appears in Rev 2:11, 20:6, although in these cases it does not clarify the lake of fire.

<sup>823</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1065-66.

<sup>824</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1091. These writings will be discussed later in the chapter.

This chapter will study the terms “lake of fire” and “second death”. First it will seek to find a plausible origin of these terms. Jewish, Graeco-Roman and Egyptian backgrounds will be investigated. It will be shown that the most immediate background is the Egyptian. Next, we discuss how these terms forming part of the Egyptian myths of the underworld could be familiar to populations in Asia Minor and the seven churches of Revelation in particular. Last, this chapter will determine how this new Egyptian mythology context informs our understanding of John’s imagery and its function in the passages affecting the fate of the nations.

## 8.1 The lake of fire as a concept derived from Jewish literature.

Beale suggests that the lake of fire in Revelation is a blending of the “beast’s place of punishment in Dan. 7:11 and the directly preceding description of the fiery river before God’s throne.”<sup>825</sup> The purpose of this combination is “to locate the beast’s punishment before the divine throne.”<sup>826</sup> He claims that John utilizes these two images in Rev 19 and 20 to create the concept of a fiery lake in which the wicked are destroyed. To further support his case, Beale points out that the context of Dan 7:10 is judgement.<sup>827</sup> Likewise, in Rev 20:11-12 the great white throne is present as well as the notion of judgement based on heavenly books and records.<sup>828</sup>

Osborne begins from different HB imagery, namely, that of destruction by fire and burning sulphur. A prominent example is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen. 19:24. The image of fire and burning sulphur is also found in intertestamental works such as 1En. 21:7-10; 67:4-13; 90:25.<sup>829</sup> Since these images are not sufficient in themselves to explain the *lake* mentioned in Revelation, Osborn suggests that John borrowed the lake imagery from “Hellenistic mythical portrayals of hell.”<sup>830</sup> Aune takes a similar approach, beginning with the notion that throughout the HB the fire imagery was common to theophanies. In Sinai, God is depicted as descending on the mountain with fire (Ex 19:18), whereas in Dan 7:10 rivers of fire

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<sup>825</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>826</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>827</sup> Κριτήριον ἐκάθισε καὶ βίβλοι ἡνεώχθησαν LXX

<sup>828</sup> Καὶ εἶδον θρόνον μέγαν λευκόν... καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς, τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ τοὺς μικρούς, ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου, καὶ βιβλία ἡνοίχθησαν· καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἡνοίχθη, ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς· καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 970.

<sup>829</sup> In three of the “lake of fire” occurrences, Rev 19:20; 20:10; 21:8, John mentions sulphur. He also mentions it in Rev 14:10 where the lake of fire is not explicitly mentioned but is probably implied.

<sup>830</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 690.

flow from God's throne. The use of fire in divine judgement was also common and Aune suggests that it was but a short step to the depiction of streams of fire flowing down from heaven in judgement for the wicked that we meet in later extra biblical Jewish writings (Sib. Or. 2.196-205, 286; 3.54, 84-85; 7.120-121; 8:243; Ps. Sol. 15:4).<sup>831</sup>

There is little doubt that Rev 20 leans on Dan 7. Both passages explore the notion of divine judgement. The colour white, symbol of justice, is prominent in both sources; in Daniel in the clothing of the Ancient of Days and in Revelation in the colour of the throne. Fire, the ultimate source of which is God, is present in both; in Daniel it comes from the throne of God (καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ποταμὸς πυρός), and in Rev 20:9 from heaven (κατέβη πυρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτούς). Beale's proposal encounters the same criticism as Aune's. It fails to explain the concept of a *lake* that we meet in Revelation. The word lake is not present in Daniel. There is no shortage of images of fire as means of delivering judgement in antiquity. As Aune also noted, there are several passages where the fire is used as a method of eliminating sinners both in the HB and in other non-canonical sources (e.g., 1En. 10:6; 13 48:5).<sup>832</sup> Beale is content with the rivers of fire as a precursor to the lake of fire, whereas Osborn and Aune resort to the Greek underworld myths for the concept of a lake. However, a brief look at the passages Aune cites will show that these underworld lakes varied significantly from the lake of fire both in their description and function.

## 8.2 Underground rivers and lakes in Graeco-Roman myths

Graeco-Roman mythology provides the imagery of underworld rivers as well as underworld lakes. Not all myths agree in every detail but several seem to have been shared. For instance, most myths accepted the existence of five rivers in the underworld: Styx was the river of hate; Acheron the river of woe; Lethe the river of forgetfulness; Cocytus the river of wailing and Pyriphlegethon (or phlegethon) the river of fire.<sup>833</sup> The dead souls were transported to the underworld by Charon. In some versions, Charon traveled across the Styx whereas in other sources he sailed across the Acheron.<sup>834</sup> The dead were buried with a coin in their mouths as a

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<sup>831</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1066.

<sup>832</sup> The first reference is to Azaz'el and the second to the kings and the powerful who possess the land. The fate of both is described in terms of burning.

<sup>833</sup> Mark Morford and Robert Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 349.

<sup>834</sup> e.g., *Aeneid* 6.364-373.

payment for Charon's transportation services.<sup>835</sup> The gate to the underworld was guarded by Cerberus, a many-headed dog which prevented anyone from escaping back into the world of the living. The underworld rivers formed lakes and marshes that belonged to the realm of the underworld.<sup>836</sup> The most famous was the Acherusian lake into which the river Acheron flowed.

The descriptions of the underworld usually came from “eyewitness” accounts of people who visited there and returned to tell of their experiences. The views of the underworld were not consistent. Since much of what is known concerning the geography of Hades is based on the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*,<sup>837</sup> Homer’s and Virgil’s accounts will be discussed. Additionally, Plato’s views on the underworld will also be reviewed. Plato clearly knew Homer’s account since he referred to it in the *Republic*,<sup>838</sup> and his views are relevant here because he describes the existence of underworld rivers and bodies of water. Last, Plutarch will also be discussed. He gives valuable descriptions of the underworld lakes and some of his general comments of the underworld are relevant to our discussion.<sup>839</sup>

Homer's account of the trip of Odysseus to the underworld is one of the earliest and best known. The underworld is depicted as a gloomy place of shadows void of any pleasure or ray of hope. There is seemingly no individual punishment for the sins committed in life. A special punishment is implied for the worst of sinners who are those who have committed great crimes against the gods,<sup>840</sup> but fiery torments are absent even for these greatest of sinners. The underworld is separated from the world of the living by the stream of Oceanus,<sup>841</sup> and Anticlea, Odysseus’ mother, later speaks of rivers that need to be crossed in order to access Hades.<sup>842</sup>

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<sup>835</sup> A coin was also found with the bones of a high priest believed to be Caiaphas. The coin was minted in 43 AD during the reign of Herod Agrippa I. Its discovery may suggest the adoption of this custom even by some who belonged to the religious elite. Michael Specter, “Tomb May Hold the Bones Of Priest Who Judged Jesus,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 1992, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/14/world/tomb-may-hold-the-bones-of-priest-who-judged-jesus.html>.

<sup>836</sup> *Aeneid* 6.135-139.

<sup>837</sup> Luke Roman and Monica Roman, “Hades,” in *Encyclopedia of Greek and Roman Mythology* (New York, NY: Facts On File Inc, 2010), 184.

<sup>838</sup> Plato *Republic*, 10.612b.

<sup>839</sup> The texts to be studied in this section include all the references to the underworld lakes that Aune mentions except those that show Christian influence: *Sib. Or.* 2.334-38; *Apoc. Peter* 23, 26; *Apoc. Paul* 22. Aune incorrectly cites *Apoc. Peter* 14. Lakes as a place of torment appear only in *Apoc. Peter* 23, 26. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1066. Additionally, the references to lakes from the Greek Magical papyri are not discussed here since they simply mention lakes incidentally and do not offer any details that would further our understanding of their function in the underworld.

<sup>840</sup> Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 333.

<sup>841</sup> *Od.* 11.21-22.

<sup>842</sup> *Od.* 11.158.

However, these streams only function as obstacles for the living to access the world of the dead. The text does not contain the idea of a lake or even a fiery river as a place of punishment.

Plato's myth of Er, which concludes the *Republic*, contains another account of a trip to the underworld. The obvious difference from the *Odyssey* account is the idea of an afterlife judgement which determines the fate of the souls after death. While the wicked do suffer under the earth, Plato fails to describe the nature of their suffering. Rivers and lakes are also absent from his description and, notably, the souls are not transferred through rivers but through openings (χάσματα).<sup>843</sup> After a thousand years of punishment or rewards, the souls are brought together to choose the form of their afterlife. In most cases, the choice is based on the experiences of their previous life.<sup>844</sup> However, before the souls are to re-enter the new life cycle they are made to drink from the waters of the river Lethe, the function of which is to remove all memories from the minds of the souls that are about to be reincarnated.<sup>845</sup>

In contrast to the *Republic*, which mentions only Lethe, Plato's *Phaedo* refers to several bodies of water in the underworld. The first mentioned is Oceanus, which flows around the earth in a circle,<sup>846</sup> then Acheron, which passes under the earth and flows into the Acherusian lake. Styx, Cocytus and Pyriphlegethon are also mentioned. Interestingly, none appear to be places of punishment for the wicked. Serious offenders receive their sentence in Tartarus. The Acherusian lake is where the souls of those who were not particularly evil or good will be purified.<sup>847</sup> Those who are suffering in Tartarus also have an opportunity to visit the lake annually and call upon their victims for forgiveness.<sup>848</sup> If their petitions are accepted their troubles are over; they are released from their prison and travel to their pure home above (εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οἴκησιν).<sup>849</sup> Otherwise they are carried back into Tartarus for further punishment. The idea of fire as a means of punishment is absent. Fire is only present in the description of the Pyriphlegethon river. Although different rivers carry different kinds of offenders, the place of punishment seems to be not the river, but the destination (Tartarus).

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<sup>843</sup> Plato *Republic* 614c.

<sup>844</sup> For example, Orpheus choosing the life of a swan hating the possibility of becoming a woman since women murdered him and Odysseus choosing the life of a private man with no cares because of his previous troublesome life. Plato *Republic* 10.620a-c.

<sup>845</sup> Plato *Republic* 621a.

<sup>846</sup> Plato *Phaedo* 112e.

<sup>847</sup> Plato *Phaedo* 113d.

<sup>848</sup> This provision does not apply to the worst offenders, who are never allowed out of Tartarus.

<sup>849</sup> Plato *Phaedo* 114c.

A somewhat different description appears in Plutarch's *On the Sign of Socrates* (*Gen. Socr.*). Here the description of the underworld comes up in the discussion between Simmias and Theocritus. According to Simmias, Timarchus of Chaeroneia descended to the crypt of Trophonius, and remained underground for two nights and a day. When he came out, he related the wonders he saw and heard in his visit to the underworld.

His otherworldly journey took place when his soul leaked out (*διασπάσας*) of the seams (*ῥαφάς*) of his body and was let loose (*μεθιέναι*).<sup>850</sup> As the soul travelled it looked up and saw no earth only islands illuminated by soft fire (*λαμπομένας μαλακῶ πυρί*),<sup>851</sup> the purpose of which in this context was to illuminate. It is not described as burning fire, it is called "soft". Next, the story describes the sound of the scenery which, like the colours that were described in soft terms, is also portrayed as smooth whirling in the ether (*τὸν αἰθέρα... ὑπορροιζεῖν ... τῆς κινήσεως λειότητι*).<sup>852</sup>

In between the islands was a sea or a lake (*θάλασσαν ἢ λίμνην*).<sup>853</sup> Aune cites this as proving the existence of underworld lakes in Greek mythology.<sup>854</sup> This was the only place in the story that a lake is mentioned but it should be noted that the context does not suggest this lake or sea was an abode of souls. The details of the story suggest that it was the heavens and that the islands in it are the planets and the stars, as is also evidenced by the fact that the soul "looked up" (*ἀναβλέψας*) to see this body of water.<sup>855</sup> Fiery rivers flow to that sea and make its water boil, but the description of the fiery rivers makes no mention of torment there.<sup>856</sup> Timarchus noticed the abode of the dead when he looked down (*κάτω δ' ἀπιδόντι*) and he described it as a great round chasm (*χάσμα μέγα στρογγύλον*).<sup>857</sup> That chasm was filled with darkness (*σκοτούς πληῖρες*) and agitation (*ἐκταραττομένου*),<sup>858</sup> from which emanated sounds of groans and wailing of animals, infants, men and women. As Timarchus was marvelling at what

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<sup>850</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 590b.

<sup>851</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 590c.

<sup>852</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 590c.

<sup>853</sup> Simmias is not certain what exactly that body of water is. *Gen. Socr.* 590d.

<sup>854</sup> Aune, *Revelation* 17-22, 1066.

<sup>855</sup> Some consider the "sea and its circular movement represent the celestial sphere and its apparent diurnal motion" or others the milky way. Phillip De Lacy and Benedict Einarson, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. VII (Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 1959), 463.

<sup>856</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 590f.

<sup>857</sup> De Lacy and Einarson translate *χάσμα* as abyss. De Lacy and Einarson, *Moralia*, VII:467.

<sup>858</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 590f.

he observed, a voice explained to him that the higher regions, where Timarchus previously saw the sea/lake, belonged to the gods and mortals have little to do with them.<sup>859</sup>

This description of the underworld also lacks fiery lakes or seas in which the souls are being tormented. The place where the human souls reside is described as a great, dark chasm. The constant sounds of wailing clearly make it an unhappy, gloomy place but fire is nowhere described as a means of torment.

The last detailed description of the underworld to be reviewed here comes from Vergil's *Aeneid*. Once again, the rivers Acheron, Styx, Cocytus, Phlegethon and Lethe are mentioned. Specifically, Styx and Cocytus are said to form marshes and deep pools. Some dead seem to congregate on the banks of these rivers, whereas some others are carried across by the ferryman. Sibyl explains to Aeneas that those who are not carried are the poor and the unburied (*Aen.* 6:325-330). While these souls suffer, it is clear from the text that this is not punishment for their sins. Fire is also absent from the description of their suffering.

Tartarus appears later in the story. In harmony with the previous accounts, it is the place of punishment for the wicked. Phlegethon, the river of fire, encircles it. In the *Aeneid*, the function of Phlegethon does not seem to be torment or even punishment. Rather, the fires of Phlegethon seem to be the part of the fortifications of Tartarus that render it impregnable. It is also worth noting that the only thing specifically mentioned in the river Phlegethon is "rolling clashing rocks".<sup>860</sup> Tartarus is described as an impregnable fortress that no human or divine force can violate. Torment does take place within its walls; lashes, grating iron and the dragging of chains are heard. Aeneas is later instructed by Sibyl of the terrible tortures that await those enclosed in Tartarus. Whipping is mentioned as well as tortures by mythical creatures, but fire is not used as an instrument of torture.

The fire imagery appears again when Aeneas encounters his father,<sup>861</sup> who explains that the purpose of the fire is not punitive but rather for purging the soul for Elysium.<sup>862</sup> After a thousand years have passed and all corruption has perished, the god calls these pure ethereal

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<sup>859</sup> *Gen. Socr.* 591a.

<sup>860</sup> Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 343. *Aeneid* 6.550-555.

<sup>861</sup> Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 347.

<sup>862</sup> The Elysian fields were the places of reward for epic heroes. Roger D. Woodard, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 471.

spirits with the fire of the original essence to drink from the river of Lethe and return to their bodies.<sup>863</sup>

The previous stories of the underworld were discussed because of their references to fire and large bodies of water. However, the defining characteristic of Tartarus in Greek thought was not fire but coldness. Plutarch claims in *De primo frigido* 9 that Tartarus is named for its coldness. He explains that the place is called Hades and Acheron because it is invisible (ἀειδής)<sup>864</sup> and colourless (ἄχρωστον). Plutarch claims that this is precisely why when a man trembles from cold he is said to ταρταρίζω (shiver).<sup>865</sup> The fact that the word Tartarus became a synonym for cold and shivering demonstrates that fire was not its defining characteristic but mist and cold.<sup>866</sup> The use of the word ταρταρίζω in the common language, as Plutarch noted above, may also indicate the widespread acceptance of this belief.<sup>867</sup>

These stories deviate significantly from the lake of fire in Revelation. Scholars who maintain that the concept of a lake in Revelation has its roots in the Graeco-Roman myths of the underworld thus need to argue that John added the imagery of fire as means of divine judgement from his Jewish heritage.<sup>868</sup> But as we already saw, the imagery of an underworld lake in the Greek mythology was not very common and whenever it was mentioned its function was significantly different from that of Revelation. In the Greek tales, Hades was cold and gloomy, not hot and fiery. The suggestion of mixing the Graeco-Roman underworld rivers and lakes with the fiery punishments of second temple Judaism is technically plausible. However, if an underworld mythology is found that already contains the idea of a fiery lake and it seems reasonable to assume that John could have access to that mythology, then it should take priority over theories that require a more complex and hypothetical syncretic process. Such an alternative proposal will be discussed next for the background of John's lake of fire.

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<sup>863</sup> Morford and Lenardon, *Classical Mythology*, 347.

<sup>864</sup> Literally formless. See also LSJ, s.v. “ἀειδής,” where it is defined “without form”.

<sup>865</sup> Plutarch *De primo frigido*, 9.

<sup>866</sup> See also Hesiod, *Theogony* 807 where Tartarus is called misty (ἡρόεντος from ἡρόεις).

<sup>867</sup> The word survives in modern Greek as τουργιζω.

<sup>868</sup> See, for example, Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1066.



### 8.3 The lake of fire in Egyptian mythology.

The concept of a fiery lake is absent from Jewish and Graeco-Roman sources, but is present in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, a collection of funerary texts that ancient Egyptian scribes wrote on behalf of the deceased. These texts came into use before the establishment of the New Kingdom (ca. 1550 BC) and were used for more than 1500 years.<sup>869</sup> The title Book of the Dead was given at first by the Egyptian tomb robbers who used it for every inscribed papyrus they found together with the mummies. The genitive “of the dead” simply denoted possession (i.e., “a dead man’s book”).<sup>870</sup> Papyrus was not the only medium used for the spells in the book. At first these spells were inscribed on the pyramids (pyramid texts) and later on coffins (coffin texts).<sup>871</sup> These are generally considered precursors of the Book of the Dead.<sup>872</sup> The ancient Egyptians called it “the book of coming forth by day”.<sup>873</sup>

The Book of the Dead contained spells, incantations, hymns, litanies, magical formulae and names, words of power, and prayers.<sup>874</sup> No complete copy of the Book of the Dead has been found, although by the Late Period (664-332 BC) the sequence of the spells had been nearly fixed.<sup>875</sup> The purpose of all these texts was to help the dead person make it through the perils of the afterlife, escape the various pitfalls that awaited him there and eventually succeed in achieving the elevated state of *akh*. The *akhu* (plural of *akh*) would be assimilated to specific gods connected with creation and rebirth,<sup>876</sup> such as Ra and Osiris. The latter came to be the most significant god of the dead and the eternal ruler of their realm.<sup>877</sup>

In the Book of the Dead, the lake of fire appears as an integral part of the process of judgement. The deceased in his perilous journey arrived outside the Hall of Maati (order). When

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<sup>869</sup> Munro Irmtraut, “The Evolution of the Book of the Dead,” in *Journey Through Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. John H. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 54.

<sup>870</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead* (The Floating Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>871</sup> James Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2015), 30.

<sup>872</sup> The papyrus did not replace the pyramid or coffin texts, which continued to be “an important form of funerary inscription in later centuries after the emergence of the Book of the Dead.” Irmtraut, “The Evolution of the Book of the Dead,” 54.

<sup>873</sup> Irmtraut, “The Evolution of the Book of the Dead,” 55.

<sup>874</sup> Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 4.

<sup>875</sup> Lorna Oakes and Lucia Gahlin, *The Mysteries of Ancient Egypt* (London: Lorenz Books, 2003), 404.

<sup>876</sup> Despite the fact that assimilation was the goal, the dead were never fully integrated with the gods but retained their distinct earthly identities. John H. Taylor, “Life and Afterlife in the Ancient Egyptian Cosmos,” in *Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. John H. Taylor (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 19.

<sup>877</sup> Taylor, “Life and Afterlife,” 19.

the deceased pronounced the magical names of the doors, they opened, and he entered the hall. Across the hall on each side were seated forty-two gods in two rows. As the deceased walked the long corridor he made a negative confession.<sup>878</sup> He addressed each of the forty-two deities by name declaring that he had not committed a particular sin.<sup>879</sup> The hall was often ornamented with Maat feathers (sign of truth, order and justice),<sup>880</sup> Uraeus Serpents (snakes in an upright form symbolizing sovereignty, deity, and royalty) and hieroglyphs with the sign for fire. Osiris, the great God of the underworld, presided over the weighing of the heart of the deceased and the whole event was also attended by Isis, Nephthys and the four sons of Horus. Weighing the heart itself was the key event in the judgement of the deceased.<sup>881</sup>

Depictions of the weighing of the heart on papyrus show a balance standing on the floor of the hall and on its two arms are suspended the heart of the deceased on one and an ostrich feather on the other.<sup>882</sup> Thoth, often in a baboon form, squats and supervises as Horus. Later, Anubis, the jackal-headed god, performs the actual weighing of the heart.<sup>883</sup> According to Egyptian belief, the heart was the most important organ of the body,<sup>884</sup> which is why it was not removed during the mummification process. The ancient Egyptians believed that it was the center of intelligence and contained the memory and all the records of the deeds of the deceased. It was possible however that the heart did not remain inactive in this process but spoke on its own accord and confessed sins of the deceased. To avoid such an unfortunate turn of events, a spell was devised intended to stop the heart from giving damning testimony during the judgement.<sup>885</sup> According to Taylor, the spell reveals the process of purification. There was no need for a lengthy process of purgation; ritual knowledge was sufficient to help the deceased.<sup>886</sup> The ideal outcome of the weighing was the balancing of the heart with the Maat. In later years,

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<sup>878</sup> Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 34.

<sup>879</sup> e.g., "O Fenti, comer forth from Khemenu, I have not robbed". Budge, 33.

<sup>880</sup> John H. Taylor, "Preparing for the Afterlife," in *Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. John H. Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>881</sup> Oakes and Gahlin, *The Mysteries of Ancient Egypt*, 404.

<sup>882</sup> The ostrich feather was the sign of Maat, a noun that means among other things proper behaviour. James P. Allen, *Middle Egyptian: An Introduction to the Language and Culture of Hieroglyphs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 97.

<sup>883</sup> John H. Taylor, "Judgement," in *Journey Through the Afterlife: Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, ed. John H. Taylor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 209.

<sup>884</sup> Taylor, "Life and Afterlife," 17.

<sup>885</sup> From spell 30B: "...O my heart of my mother! O my heart of my different forms! Do not stand up as a witness against me, do not be opposed to me in the tribunal..." Taylor, 209. This spell was usually inscribed on a scarab-shaped amulet. Specific instructions indicated how the amulet was to be made and used. Taylor 2010, 44.

<sup>886</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 212.

probably under the influence of the Graeco-Roman world, the story is slightly different, with one's good deeds needing to balance one's bad deeds.<sup>887</sup>

If the judgement did not go as expected, the deceased was to be turned over to Ammit, the Devourer.<sup>888</sup> The Devourer was a composite beast with the head of a crocodile, forelegs of a lion and rear of a hippopotamus.<sup>889</sup> As the years passed, its depiction changes and it resembles a large dog.<sup>890</sup> At first, the Devourer stood under the balance, although later it stood by the throne of Osiris.<sup>891</sup> The Devourer would eat up the heart of any deceased that was found wanting in the scale<sup>892</sup> and the body would be destroyed in the lake of fire.<sup>893</sup> This destruction was called the second death. The term "second death" meant the end of the existence of the dead in the afterlife. Those who suffered that state had no further hope for existence, although it was apparently a popular belief that they could still haunt and harm the living.<sup>894</sup>

Clearly the Egyptian context of the lake of fire fits that of Revelation much better than the ancient Greek. In both the Book of the Dead and Revelation, the term lake of fire refers to a pool of fire not a body of water. Additionally, the Egyptian background is the only one that contains the term "lake of fire". There is no need to postulate a complicated transmission of this idea through Greek and Jewish traditions.

The lake of fire in Egyptian mythology also fits Revelation thematically better than the function of the lakes in Greek sources. In both Revelation and the Book of the Dead, the lake of fire is the sentence of the judgement on the wicked. In Egyptian mythology, the judgement is before Osiris with the weighing of the heart, in Revelation it is the judgement before the great white throne and the open books (Rev. 20:11-15). In both cases, the unfortunate outcome of the judgement is being cast into the lake of fire.

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<sup>887</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 209.

<sup>888</sup> Originally his name was am[et] mutu which means the one who devours the dead. Mutu does not refer to the dead per se but rather to the damned or those who failed to be vindicated at the judgment. Taylor, "Judgement," 214.

<sup>889</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 213-14.

<sup>890</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 232.

<sup>891</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 214.

<sup>892</sup> Budge, *The Book of the Dead*, 32. Taylor, "Judgement," 212. fig. 65.

<sup>893</sup> It is not entirely clear whether the destruction in the lake of fire represents a different or the same depiction of destruction as Ammit devouring the heart.

<sup>894</sup> Taylor, "Life and Afterlife," 23.

In both the Book of the Dead and Revelation, being cast into the lake of fire signified the second death.<sup>895</sup> Since the term second death is as rare as the term lake of fire, the combination of two rare terms strongly suggests that John borrowed these features from Egyptian mythology. Next, we will explore the meaning of second death in order to determine if its use in Revelation suggests Egyptian origin or another background.

## 8.4 Second death

The term second death occurs four times in Revelation (Rev 2:11; 20:6; 20:14; 21:8). As seen previously, the term “second death” is very rare. It is not found in the rest of the New Testament or in pre-Christian Greek Literature. Aune notes that the term is found in “nearly contemporary Greek literature” and particularly in Plutarch’s *De Facie* 942F. Aune’s observation that Plutarch was familiar with Egyptian myth and ritual is noteworthy.<sup>896</sup> However, the term is used positively in Plutarch’s text, unlike in Revelation where it carries negative connotations. Plutarch regards humans as tripartite beings composed of body (σῶμα), soul (ψυχή), and intelligence or mind (νοῦς). During the first death, the being is liberated from the body. The soul and the mind of the just then moves on to the moon. The second death signifies the death of the soul and the liberation of the mind to go to live in bliss on the sun.<sup>897</sup> Such a positive use of the term is incompatible with the usage in the Egyptian myth where the second death was a very unfortunate turn of events for the individual that suffered that fate. Indeed, the very purpose of the Book of the Dead was so that people would avoid such an outcome; hence a spell in chapter 135 reads: “If this chapter is known to the deceased, he shall not die a second time”.<sup>898</sup> Likewise, Plutarch’s usage is incompatible with Revelation, which promises protection over the second death for the victors (Rev. 2:11), and that those who will participate in the first resurrection will not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 20:6).<sup>899</sup>

According to Macrobius, the notion of the two deaths was circulated by philosophical traditions linked with Pythagoras and Plato. Macrobius was probably a non-Christian writer

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<sup>895</sup> See Rev 20:14.

<sup>896</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1091.

<sup>897</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 118.

<sup>898</sup> Alice Grenfell, “Egyptian Mythology and the Bible,” *The Monist* 16, no. 2 (1906): 183. See also Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 132.

<sup>899</sup> McNamara also finds the similarities purely external; see McNamara, *The New Testament*, 118.

who wrote at the beginning of the fifth century AD.<sup>900</sup> Even though his writings come many years after Revelation, the philosophical traditions he writes about predate Revelation. According to Macrobius, the Pythagoreans and the Platonists spoke of two deaths, one of the soul and the other the death of the creature. While the creature dies when the soul leaves the body, the soul itself also can die “when it leaves the single and individual source of its origin and is allotted to a mortal body.”<sup>901</sup>

The reference is rather confusing since apparently the author numbers the two deaths differently. Whereas in Revelation and Plutarch the first death refers to the natural death, in Macrobius the natural death is the second death. Before the natural death, the soul has died when it separated from its origin and was incarnated. Apart from mentioning two deaths, there is little other similarity to Revelation which does not refer ever to the pre-existence of souls. Moreover, while Macrobius seems to hint at a cycle in which the soul eventually returns to its source, Revelation portrays the journey of the wicked in a linear way in which they eventually end up in the lake of fire. Last, whereas the Greek sources speak of souls, Revelation never mentions the term souls in connection with the second death. Those who suffer the second death are the wicked who have previously been resurrected (Rev. 20:5a, 12-13) and the passages do not mention them being souls.<sup>902</sup> Thus, neither of the two deaths in Revelation are deaths of souls, at least not of souls in Plato’s sense meaning disembodied entities. In Revelation, the first death seems to be the physical death and the second is the final death the resurrected wicked suffer after their judgement.<sup>903</sup>

Aune also refers to Epictetus 1.5.4 where the text speaks of the deadening of the soul and to Odysseus’s trip to Hades, where the term *δισθανής* “twice dead” is used.<sup>904</sup> These references as well as Achilles Tatius 7.5.3 and Lucian *De mort.* 7.2 speak of “double death” or “death of soul and body”, and in Lucian of “death from this place”. All these examples remain unconvincing since they fail to use the term second death.<sup>905</sup> Aune also finds these examples

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<sup>900</sup> P. W. van der Horst, “Macrobius and the New Testament” 15 (1973): 220-32.

<sup>901</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1091.

<sup>902</sup> Revelation assumes that rewards will be given to people “at the end of the age through resurrection”. Koester, *Revelation*, 362. This was also the belief of the function of resurrection in Judaism: “God raises the dead in order to recompense them.” George Nickelsburg, “Resurrection,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 5: 684-691.

<sup>903</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 367.

<sup>904</sup> *Odyssey* 12.22.

<sup>905</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1092.

unpersuasive, concluding that the source of the notion of a second death in the Hellenistic world is the Egyptian conception of the second death, “even though the means of transmission is not known”.<sup>906</sup>

The second death appears in the Targums several times, but not with a consistent meaning. The *Tg. Jer.* 51:39 reads: “I will bring upon them distress and they shall be like drunken men so that they may not be strong and they shall die the second death and shall not live in the world to come.”<sup>907</sup> On a similar note, *Tg. Jer.* 51:57 reads: “They shall die the second death and shall not come to the world to come.”<sup>908</sup> In both passages, the second death refers to exclusion from the resurrection. The underlying Hebrew text of the passages in question speaks of these people sleeping a perpetual sleep (שְׁנַת-עוֹלָם Jer. 51:39). The second death in the Targum defines this “perpetual sleep” of the Hebrew text. Revelation however envisions a resurrection for the wicked (Rev. 20:5). In John’s scenario, the wicked dead will not remain in their graves but will awake for their punishment, which is precisely why this death is called *second* in Revelation.<sup>909</sup> Although in both the *Tg. Jer.* and Revelation, the second death refers to a future punishment and exclusion from the future blessings of God, the usage is not identical.

The *Tg. Deut.* 33:6 employs the second death in a different way. It was hailed in the Talmud as a proof of the resurrection. The Paris MSS 110 of the fragmentary Targum (FT) renders the passage as: “Let Reuben live in this world and die not in the second death in which death the wicked die in the world to come”.<sup>910</sup> In this passage, the second death is not simply a continuation of the eternal sleep of death but an event that happens to the wicked in the world to come. Since this text was associated in the Talmud (*Sanh.* 92a) with resurrection, at least by implication the second death occurs after that resurrection.

The second death also appears in the *Tg. Isa.* 22:14. The passage is a prophecy against some whom McNamara calls “Epicurean minded Jews.” The polemical rhetoric represents

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<sup>906</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1092.

<sup>907</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 119. (Trans. McNamara).

<sup>908</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 120. (Trans. McNamara).

<sup>909</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 367.

<sup>910</sup> There are some manuscripts that contain variations. For instance, Leipzig MS No 1 reads instead of מוֹתָא מוֹתָא. The usual meaning of מוֹתָא is plague and according to McNamara such a reading would not make sense in this context. The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan follows Paris 110 but omits the word “second” which is found in other Targum translations of *Deut.* 33:6. This variant should be dismissed as a scribal error. McNamara, *The New Testament*, 121. (Trans. McNamara).

them as following the motto “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (Isa. 22:13 NRSV).<sup>911</sup> Presumably, people whose philosophy was to enjoy life before death would not be deterred from their ways by being reminded that they would simply die, which is why the Targum added the notion that their sin would not be forgiven, not only till they die, but until they die the second death to the Hebrew text: “This sin shall not be forgiven you till you die the second death says the Lord of hosts”.<sup>912</sup> Here too, the second death appears as a fate more terrible than death but it is not made explicitly clear if this entails a prior resurrection.

The second death appears twice in the *Tg. Isa. 65*. The translation of the Aramaic Targum of Isa. 65:5-6 reads: “Their punishment shall be in Gehenna where the fire burns all the day. Behold it is written before me: I will not give them respite during (their) life but will render them the punishment of their transgressions and will deliver their body to the second death”.<sup>913</sup> In this passage, Gehenna, the equivalent to Revelation’s lake of fire, is equated with the second death. McNamara provides this passage as the exact parallel to Rev. 20:14 and 21:8.<sup>914</sup> In addition, the fact that God “will not give them respite” seems to reflect the message of the third angel in Rev. 14:11 where the wicked who worship the beast and its image do not have rest day or night (οὐκ ἔχουσιν ἀνάπαυσιν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ) as they are facing fiery torments, although admittedly neither the lake of fire nor the second death are mentioned in Rev. 14. However, unlike *Tg. Deut. 33:6*, there is no hint of resurrection in this passage. It simply describes God’s retribution on the wicked and hypocritical Israelites.

Finally, the second death also appears in *Tg. Isa. 65:15*. The Hebrew passage of Isa. 65:13-16 juxtaposes the different fates of God’s servants with those of the wicked in five “theses and antitheses.”<sup>915</sup> The last contrast is portrayed in the reverse order. The name of the wicked will be left to God’s chosen people to use as a curse and “the Lord GOD will put you to death; but to his servants he will give a different name” (Isa. 65:15 NRSV). The Targum translation is faithful to the Hebrew Text, only adding the phrase “with the second death” after the words “slay you”, rendering the text as “...the Lord GOD will slay you with the second

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<sup>911</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 122.

<sup>912</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 122. (Trans. McNamara.)

<sup>913</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 123. (Trans. McNamara.)

<sup>914</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 123.

<sup>915</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, 7:620. For example “...My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; my servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty...” Isa. 65:13.

death.”<sup>916</sup> Once again, no resurrection is mentioned. The second death appears to be God’s punishment on the wicked Israelites.

All these passages use the term second death and understand it as a terrible, final punishment but there is no consistent usage of the term. Significantly, these passages do not define the second death in relation to the first. The *Tg. Deut.* 33:6 comes closest to this, since it seems to imply a resurrection prior to the final punishment of the second death. The *Tg. Jer.* 51:39, 51 seems to conflate the two deaths by defining second death as remaining in the grave. In this case, the punishment is defined in terms of not having an opportunity to live in the world to come. The world to come is not addressed in the *Tg. Isa.* 22:14. The phrase second death there is probably designed to augment the magnitude of the punishment. However, the limited context does not allow us to draw more inferences on the significance of the second death in this case. *Tg. Isa.* 65:5-6 is the only passage that equates punishment in Gehenna with the second death. Nevertheless, this passage lacks any reference to a resurrection. Neither does it explain why this death is called second. Does it come after the natural death? We are simply not told. In fact, the natural interpretation is that it refers to apostate Israel being thrown into Gehenna just before God establishes his kingdom.

It is clear that the term second death in the Targums resembles the occurrences of the term in Revelation more closely than any other text we studied previously. At the same time, its use is neither identical with Revelation nor consistent everywhere in the Targums. The nature of the Targums also makes it impossible to factor its sayings into the discussion for the source of the term in Revelation. While the Targums generally may use language and content that reflects the New Testament era, they refer to late events and persons.<sup>917</sup> The use of such material may remain precarious.<sup>918</sup> Even if the Targums may “preserve older traditions that go back to the prophets”<sup>919</sup> it is impossible to know with certainty that the employment of the phrase

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<sup>916</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 123. (Trans. McNamara.)

<sup>917</sup> Alexander, for instance, notes that Pseudo-Jonathan refers to the six orders of the Mishnah (Exod. 26:9; 36:16), the 613 commandments (Exod. 24:12), and to the wife and daughter of Muhammad (Gen 21:21) etc. Philip S. Alexander, “Targum, Targumim,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 6:320-331.

<sup>918</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 5.

<sup>919</sup> McNamara, *The New Testament*, 7.



second death reflects those older traditions. Most of these Targums are thought to have been written centuries after Revelation.<sup>920</sup>

To sum up, the Targums call God's punishment second death in some cases. This punishment was sometimes understood as exclusion from the resurrection (*Tg. Jer.* 51:39, 57) and at least in one instance as a punishment, probably after a resurrection (*Tg. Deut.* 33:6). In another case (*Tg. Isa.* 65:5-6), the fires of Gehenna are described as being the second death. What seems to be the common denominator is that all occurrences explicitly or implicitly understand the second death as a punishment whose effects extend to the world to come. However, difficulty in dating the Targums should preclude us from considering them with certainty as the source from which John got the term. At best, they may bear witness to traditions which may have influenced John.

On the other hand, the Egyptian mythology appears to be a better candidate as a source of the term second death, since the second death in Egyptian mythology is one in the lake of fire, as in Rev. 20:14.<sup>921</sup> It meant an end to the person's existence<sup>922</sup> and the total destruction of the *ba* (soul) after the destruction of the body.<sup>923</sup> Chronologically, it followed the natural death considered to be the first death. It also followed an unfavourable judgement before Osiris's throne (cf. Rev. 20:11-15). In both the coffin texts and the Book of the Dead, the dreadful fate of dying a second death is mentioned and was a fate so feared as "to be avoided at all costs."<sup>924</sup> The only difference between the Egyptian belief in the afterlife and John's narrative is that John envisioned a *resurrection* that would bring the believer to judgement before God, whereas the Egyptians believed that the dead after their wandering in the *duat* would eventually enter Osiris's palace for judgement—the 'Hall of the Two Maats'.<sup>925</sup> In both cases, however, the

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<sup>920</sup> Aune considers the *Tg. Isa.* 65.6 that equates Gehenna with the second death as relatively late. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1092. The Neofiti (N) and the Fragmentary Targum (FT) of *Tg. Deut.* 33:6 include the term "second death". N "is a late, eclectic edition" of the Palestinian Targum. Stephen A. Kaufman, "On Methodology in the Study of the Targums and Their Chronology," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 7, no. 23 (1985): 123. It should probably be dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century. Alexander, "Targum, Targumim," 320-31. The FT targum is probably later than the N and the *Ps-J* is the latest of these three. Alexander, "Targum, Targumim," 320-31.

<sup>921</sup> The lake of fire was not the only way of destruction for the damned (the *mutu*). Ammit the devourer could also eat them.

<sup>922</sup> Taylor, "Life and Afterlife," 23. Bojana Mojsov, *Osiris: Death and Afterlife of a God* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 19; Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 164.

<sup>923</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1092.

<sup>924</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1092.

<sup>925</sup> Taylor, "Judgement," 205; Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 164.

believer appears to be in bodily form since even though there was no resurrection, the second death is often depicted as the destruction of the body.<sup>926</sup>

So far, our investigation has shown that the Egyptian mythology and the Book of the Dead in particular is the best candidate as John's source for the term lake of fire. However, literary and thematic correspondence between the Egyptian mythology and Revelation is not a guarantee that John used the former while composing his work. We may also reasonably assume that both John and his readers were familiar with Egyptian myths about the afterlife. As Aune correctly observes, the channel of transmission from Egypt to Revelation should be demonstrated.<sup>927</sup> It is imperative, therefore, that we should evaluate a plausible way by which John and his readers could be aware of Egyptian myths from the Book of the Dead.

## 8.5 From Egypt to Revelation: exploring possible channels of transmission

The epistolary framework of Revelation (Rev. 1:4-5 and Rev. 22:21) helps us identify the recipients of John's book.<sup>928</sup> John's introduction indicates that his audience comprised seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev 1:11). Therefore, it is on Asia Minor and these seven churches we should focus in finding possible influence from Egyptian ancient magic sources.

The main Egyptian underworld deity, Osiris, presided over the final judgement of the deceased, represented by the weighing of the heart discussed previously. Beside Osiris stood his wife and sister Isis.<sup>929</sup> Those who failed to pass the judgement found themselves devoured by Ammit and/or thrown into the lake of fire to be destroyed.

During the Ptolemaic times, new deities were introduced in an attempt to provide gods that both Greeks and Egyptians could worship.<sup>930</sup> A combination of Osiris and Apis produced

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<sup>926</sup> In some cases, Ammit the devourer is depicted as eating human bodies in its mouth. Taylor, "Judgement," 215. This suggests some sort of bodily destruction. The body was important for the afterlife which is why it was preserved through the process of mummification which symbolized the transformation of the body needed for an eternal being. Along with the body were buried food, drinks, and clothing for its sustenance. Stephen Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 201.

<sup>927</sup> It appears that Aune rejects the suggestion that the lake of fire comes from the Egyptian mythology, solely on the grounds that the "channel of transmission from Egypt to Revelation is unknown" Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1066.

<sup>928</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lxxii.

<sup>929</sup> In some early depictions, the god Ra took the place of Osiris, but those depictions were older, from the first millennium BC. Taylor, "Judgement," 207.

<sup>930</sup> A. Rosalie David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt* (New York, NY: Facts on File, 2003), 205.

the new god Serapis. Egyptian deities were generally depicted as animals, something that was offensive to Greeks. In contrast, Serapis was portrayed as a bearded man resembling Zeus.<sup>931</sup> As the king of the underworld, Serapis was often portrayed with Cerberus, who at times was depicted as a composite beast, by his feet.<sup>932</sup> This image paralleled the ancient Egyptian idea of Osiris and Ammit the devourer, who was also depicted as a composite beast. Serapis first became popular in Memphis and from there his popularity spread to Alexandria, Sabratha, Lepcis, Rome, Ephesus and even the Danube provinces.<sup>933</sup>

Isis was another popular Egyptian deity in Roman times. According to the myth, she played an important role in reassembling and mummifying the body of Osiris after Seth dismembered him. This process brought Osiris back to life. His son Horus (the Greek Harpocrates) avenged his father and took his father's place as king, and Osiris then became king of the realm of the dead.<sup>934</sup>

The worship of Egyptian gods invaded Asia Minor from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC onwards as a result of the advance of Egypt's influence. That influence was spread by military aggression and by rigorous commercial activity of Egyptian merchants in the cities of western and southwestern Asia Minor.<sup>935</sup> Magie, who studied Egyptian deities in Asia Minor in inscriptions and coins, concludes that two of the most popular Egyptian deities in Asia Minor were Isis and Serapis.<sup>936</sup> A dedication to Serapis, Isis, Anubis and the Theoi Synnaoi has been found in Ephesus.<sup>937</sup> The dedication is Hellenistic and probably indicates the existence of a sanctuary in honour of these deities. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, a temple dedicated to Serapis (Serapeum) was built,<sup>938</sup> a testament to the popularity of the Egyptian cult roughly at the time Revelation was written.

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<sup>931</sup> David Peacock, "The Roman Period (30 BC-AD 395)," in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 429.

<sup>932</sup> David Magie, "Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor in Inscriptions and on Coins," *American Journal of Archaeology* 57, no. 3 (1953): 169. The depiction Cerberus as lion/dog/wolf creature comes both from Alexandria and many cities of Asia Minor.

<sup>933</sup> Peacock, "The Roman Period (30 BC-AD 395)," 430.

<sup>934</sup> Taylor, "Life and Afterlife," 19.

<sup>935</sup> David, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Egypt*, 180. Magie, "Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor," 164.

<sup>936</sup> Magie, "Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor," 166.

<sup>937</sup> Reference to Anubis and Horus/Harpocrates as temple associate gods of Isis and Osiris. R. E. Witt, *Isis in the Ancient World* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 55. Theoi Synnaoi were gods who shared the temple of another deity.

<sup>938</sup> Magie, "Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor," 173.

Smyrna also contains evidence for an Egyptian cult as early as the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC,<sup>939</sup> as well as a temple dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>940</sup> There is evidence that sacrifices were offered there to both Isis and Serapis.<sup>941</sup> In Pergamum, the cult of Isis is attested in the early Roman period. An inscription indicates that two *hieraphoroi* dedicated statues of gods, among them Serapis, Isis, Anubis, and Osiris at the command of the goddess and linen garments which were used for the sacred procession of Isis. The city also had an altar erected to Serapis and later coins were issued by Antoninus Pius (86-161 AD) and Commodus (161-192 AD) showing Serapis seated with Cerberus at his feet.<sup>942</sup>

The other four churches of Revelation, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, were situated in the interior of Asia Minor and had less interaction with Egypt. They therefore show less epigraphical evidence for the worship of Egyptian deities. Nonetheless, coins with the images of Serapis and Isis have been found in all four cities. The representations vary. Sometimes the bust of Serapis is shown while at other times he is standing with Cerberus at his feet. Isis is often portrayed holding the infant Harpocrates or walking with the *sistrum* and *situla*.<sup>943</sup> Issuing or using coins with Egyptian deities also testifies to the popularity of the cults in question.

Magie concludes that the worship of Isis and Serapis is abundantly attested. “There is good epigraphical evidence—that mention of a sanctuary, a priest (or priestess), a *neokoros*, a group of worshippers or a festival—for an established cult of Sarapis and Isis or one of them during the Hellenistic and Roman periods in thirty-seven places on the mainland of Asia Minor and the islands in the southeastern Aegean (including Thera).”<sup>944</sup> In some cases, “the cult received official recognition in decrees of the cities” and a dedication “was made as a private act of veneration, usually ‘by command’ or in fulfillment of a vow” in eleven other cases.<sup>945</sup>

The evidence shows that the Egyptian cult was widespread in Asia Minor at the time of Revelation. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the cult became more popular when several temples were

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<sup>939</sup> The evidence is a “dedication to Anubis by a society of Synanoubiastai for Queen Stratonice.” The Synanoubiastai were a religious society that contributed to the expenses of a festival. Other similar religious societies were the Isiaistai, the Serapiastai and the Oseiriastai. Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 184.

<sup>940</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 174.

<sup>941</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 174.

<sup>942</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 175.

<sup>943</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 178. The *sistrum* was a musical instrument associated with the worship of Isis. The *situla* was a vessel. Isis is usually depicted as carrying it containing water from the Nile.

<sup>944</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 180-81.

<sup>945</sup> Magie, “Egyptian Deities in Asia Minor,” 181.

erected in honour of Isis and Serapis. The cult of Isis and Serapis was a mystery cult. This means that not all its rituals were open to non-initiates. However, some of the cult's rituals were, and Peacock is confident that the rituals associated with this cult had changed little since Pharaonic times.<sup>946</sup> The secret knowledge associated with mystery cults was probably transmitted to new converts during the time of their initiation. Records of what that knowledge entailed do not exist. However, it is assumed that such knowledge was associated with the god's ability to provide the initiate with power to overcome death and have a blessed afterlife.<sup>947</sup> The lake of fire and the second death would be precisely the kind of destinies that the initiate would want to avoid.

While we have no specific evidence that the lake of fire was included in the daily worship of Isis and Serapis in Asia Minor, it can be shown that the term was known and had entered the Graeco-Roman milieu by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, as shown by evidence from Graeco-Roman tombs found in Egypt. Marjorie Venit discusses the style and paintings of Isis, whose depiction is often in the context of scenes from the Book of the Dead, in several tombs in Egypt.<sup>948</sup>

Significant for our study are her findings on Graeco-Roman tombs in the Achmim region. One tomb from the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD is worth noting because it “intermingles Greek and Egyptian stylistic and conceptual elements and that permits the suggestion that Isis played a significant eschatological role at Achmim.”<sup>949</sup> The burial room shows at least three scenes with Isis,<sup>950</sup> and the antechamber contains evidence for the initiatory cult of Isis.<sup>951</sup> Venit notes several distinctly Greek or Roman elements. First, the ceiling of the anteroom “is enlivened with a Greek zodiac described in a Greek stylistic manner.” This is an intriguing deviation from an Egyptianized depiction.<sup>952</sup> While the subject matter of the wall paintings is clearly taken from Egyptian myths of the afterlife, the depiction of a ‘victim’ in a

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<sup>946</sup> Peacock, “The Roman Period (30 BC-AD 395),” 430. The daily rituals involved uncovering her statue at dawn and adorning it with jewels while the sacred fire was lit. The whole process was accompanied by sacred music.

<sup>947</sup> This was also the function of the Greek mysteries. Michael Cosmopoulos, *Greek Mysteries: The Archaeology of Ancient Greek Secret Cults* (London: Routledge, 2003), 263.

<sup>948</sup> Marjorie S. Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs Of Graeco-Roman Egypt: Tradition and Innovation,” in *Isis on the Nile: Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, ed. Laurent Bricault and Miguel John Versluys (Brill, 2010), 93.

<sup>949</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 98.

<sup>950</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 99.

<sup>951</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 100.

<sup>952</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 100.

painting is clearly Hellenic.<sup>953</sup> “The victim is rendered in Hellenic style, its garments are seemingly Hellenic and the mutilation...takes place on a Greek altar.”<sup>954</sup> Unlike the deceased buried in the tombs of Tuna el-Gebel, who were Egyptian priests of Thoth,<sup>955</sup> the deceased of the tomb in Achmim bears distinct Greek signs. He “stands frontally with his weight shifted onto one foot in the pose developed in Greece in the fifth century BCE, he is curly haired and short bearded in the Greek manner, and he wears a chiton with a himation pulled about his torso which, employing the stylistic vocabulary of Greece and Rome, falls in easy folds from his left arm.”<sup>956</sup> The portrayal of the deceased with hair and beard not only suggests that he is Greek or Roman but also exempts him from being a priest of Isis. Venit argues that the *situla* on his right arm as well as the initiation paintings from the antechamber suggest that the burial site belongs to an initiate into the Isis mysteries.<sup>957</sup>

The antechamber of the tomb contains a judgement scene closely following chapter 30 of the Book of the Dead. The image is damaged but clear enough to show how Thoth weighs the heart of the deceased and Ammit the devourer sits licking his lips. Next to the devourer stands a vessel with a red interior which probably contains human limbs, and which Von Bissing interpreted as the lake of fire.<sup>958</sup> The context of the judgement scene certainly permits such an interpretation. In the Book of the Dead, the lake of fire is usually depicted as a red rectangle. A vessel with a red interior may simply be a stylistic variation. Venit chooses to associate the vessel with a cauldron from the *Book of Caverns* and the *Book of the Earth* where an account is given of the Egyptian alternative to a blessed after life. Cauldrons are described in which body parts boil in the “place of Annihilation.”<sup>959</sup> Whatever the terminology, the essence of the imagery appears to be the same. This means that the imagery from the Book of the Dead, its judgement, and likely the lake of fire (or an equivalent place), were well known in the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD and were used in burial scenes in Graeco-Roman tombs in Egypt.

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<sup>953</sup> The image is damaged and there are different interpretations of what it depicts. Venit considers that it depicts a victim eviscerated by a demon. Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 118. Here we are interested in the fact that the portrayal is Graeco-Roman rather than the depiction and purpose of the image.

<sup>954</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 117. This victim should not be confused with the deceased buried in the tomb. According to Venit, the depiction probably suggests graphically the fate of those non-initiated in the cult of Isis.

<sup>955</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 93.

<sup>956</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 104.

<sup>957</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 107.

<sup>958</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 113.

<sup>959</sup> Venit, “Referencing Isis In Tombs,” 114.

The pictorial scenes in tombs should not be seen simply as decorative art. While the written spells and pictures had magical power to provide the deceased with the ability to overcome the perils of the afterlife and reach his goal of blissfulness, they provided information to the living. The common people did not need to read the hieroglyphic or hieratic cursive writing of the Book of the Dead; they were educated by its images.

The notion that the stories of the Book of the Dead could only be known to those who could read it is mistaken. There is ample evidence to suggest that many of the rituals of the Book of the Dead were performed.<sup>960</sup> Undoubtedly many of the precepts of the book were recited aloud for others to hear. Taylor explains that the word translated as “spell” literally means “utterance”. Another common expression of the Book of the Dead, *djed medu*, literally means “words to be spoken”.<sup>961</sup> It was believed that words spoken in a ritual context brought a process of creation. The phrase spoken was *peret em kheru*. This literally means “that which comes forth through the voice”. Taylor concludes that “the act of pronouncing the words itself was believed to call up the food, drink and other goods that were required.”<sup>962</sup> There is also a very strong performative element in the Book of the Dead. Ritual performances were common in ancient Egypt and continued well into Christian times. In fact, public ritual performances that involved worshipping the gods and attendance of festivals can be documented up to the sixth century AD.<sup>963</sup> What is also significant is that, despite the secret character of these rituals, foreigners knew and reported some of them. Herodotus, for instance, describes a ceremony that remarkably resembles the ceremony of the victory of Khnum, which concluded with the battle on the red lake between the god and the forces of chaos.<sup>964</sup> The Roman poet Juvenal in *Satire* 15 (An Egyptian Atrocity) “portrays a clash between the Osiris worshippers of Dendara with the devotees of Seth from Ombos which results in an act of cannibalism”.<sup>965</sup> To my knowledge, we do not have a surviving report of a ritual specifically adverting to the lake of fire. However, there is ample evidence that the Book of Dead was more than a piece of literature designed to be read or simply accompany the deceased in their graves. Its rituals were performed, its spells were uttered aloud and its teachings were widely known.

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<sup>960</sup> Wasserman, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 186.

<sup>961</sup> Taylor, “Preparing for the Afterlife,” 30.

<sup>962</sup> Taylor, “Preparing for the Afterlife,” 30.

<sup>963</sup> Robyn Gillam, *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 2006), 133.

<sup>964</sup> This red lake should probably not be identified with the lake of fire. The red colour here probably symbolizes blood. Gillam, *Performance and Drama*, 121.

<sup>965</sup> Gillam, *Performance and Drama* 122.

While the Book of the Dead contains the term lake of fire specifically, it is entirely possible that oral stories and myths generated by the spells of the book were in circulation in ancient Egypt as well as places such as Asia Minor, where Egyptian religion was influential. Interestingly, the suggestion has been made that tales from the Egyptian afterlife were behind the source of the rich man and Lazarus in the parable of Luke 16:19-31. Although the Egyptian background seems not to account for all the complexities of the parable,<sup>966</sup> the possibility that Egyptian tales influenced Jewish or early Christian thinking to some degree is far more unlikely than the possibility that tales from the Egyptian religion crept into Asia Minor. The Jewish religion was very exclusive in its nature, whereas Greek and Roman society in Asia Minor was far more syncretistic.

The purpose of this section was to discover the channels of transmission between Egyptian myths contained in the Book of the Dead and Revelation. It was shown that Egyptian religion could have been known to the audience of Revelation several decades before the composition of the book and became very popular in the region during and shortly after its writing. The most popular Egyptian deities in Asia Minor were Isis and Serapis, who are the key chthonic deities in the Book of Dead. While this study did not identify any direct evidence for the lake of fire in Asia Minor, the worship of these deities in Egypt at roughly the same time showed evidence that the myth of the lake of fire was known and depicted in Greco Roman tombs located in Egypt. The possibility should not be discounted that, even if we have not found excerpts from the Book of the Dead in Asia Minor, some of its stories did reach there. After all, the stories of the Book of the Dead described the personal eschatological beliefs of ancient Egyptians. Either as everyday stories or perhaps as secret initiatory wisdom, the belief in a lake

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<sup>966</sup> Both Lehtipuu and Papaioannou reject Gressman's proposal that the Egyptian folktale of Si-Osiris is the immediate context of the parable. Their criticism is mainly based on the fact that only the reversal of fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus in the afterlife parallels the Egyptian folktale and that several such stories existed in other contexts that could account for a background to the story. Papaioannou concedes that the immediate background is found in stories of reversal such as that of Si-Osiris, but ultimately prefers the option that a milieu of stories was behind Luke's parable. Papaioannou, *The Geography of Hell in the Teaching of Jesus*, 120. Lehtipuu also suggests that the torment of the rich man is not 'Egyptian' in the sense that Egyptians believed the wicked dead to be eaten by Ammit the devourer. She suggests that the rich man's torments are the kind that would have been described in Greek mythology, because the rich man is thirsty but is denied water. Outi Lehtipuu, *The Afterlife Imagery in Luke's Story of the Rich Man and Lazarus* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 37-38. However, the main cause of pain for the rich man appears to be the burning fire. Thirst is not the punishment of the rich man; the flames of his confinement are. Neither Papaioannou nor Lehtipuu appear to consider the alternative fate of the dead in the Egyptian mythology, namely, the lake of fire. This is why they do not factor it into their discussion of an Egyptian background. Likewise, neither notes that the fire is usually absent from the Greek concept of the underworld which is portrayed as a cold place of shadows. Even if the folktale of Si-Osiris is not the immediate context of the parable, the Egyptian portrayals of the underworld provide a better background and may well suggest an Egyptian influence.



of fire where the wicked find their ultimate fate could have been known to the worshippers of Isis and Serapis in Asia Minor.

## 8.6 Synthesis

This chapter reviewed John's use of the term lake of fire in Revelation. It was shown that the lake of fire as well as the related term second death do not exist in the HB. While there is an abundance of descriptions of fire and destruction by fire, even rivers of fire, the term *lake* is absent from all these images. It was also shown that the Greek concept of underworld lakes is inadequate to explain the lake of fire in Revelation satisfactorily. The Greeks conceived the underworld primarily as a place of shadows, coldness and darkness. Moreover, the lakes in the underworld only existed as reservoirs of souls rather than as places of eschatological punishment.

Our study of the Egyptian magic found in the Book of the Dead yielded considerably more promising results. Not only does the Book of the Dead uniquely contain the term lake of fire, but it also contains the rare term second death. The context in both cases is eschatological judgement, the effect of which seems to be irreversible. Having established this, the study turned to seeking possible points of contact between Revelation, the Book of the Dead and Egyptian religion.

It was demonstrated by numismatic and epigraphical evidence that Egyptian religion had significant influence in Asia Minor and the cities where the seven churches of Revelation were located. At least three of these cities, Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum had temples or altars dedicated to Egyptian chthonic deities. It was also shown that depictions of the lake of fire were found in Graeco-Roman tombs in Egypt around the time Revelation was composed. Finally, the oral influence of the Book of the Dead was discussed. It was argued that spells, rites, and other initiation rituals based on the Book of the Dead could have popularized the term lake of fire. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that John's use of the phrase in Revelation evoked ideas and images associated with Egyptian mythology in his audience.

If my hypothesis is correct, by choosing an Egyptian term to describe the fate of the wicked in Revelation, John bridged his sources and his book. His audience, being familiar with Egyptian religion, would recognize this and interpret the term according to its source background. John's goal is to taunt the pagans of Asia Minor who were influenced by Egyptian myths of the underworld. He threatens them with the fate they fear the most. By initiation into

the cult of Isis, these pagan worshippers hoped to receive a blessed afterlife and avoid the lake of fire. John warns them in Rev 20:15 that if their names are not written in the book of life, the lake of fire would be their final destination.

Such an antagonistic approach is not out of John's character. In his first vision in Rev 1:18 'one like the son of man', undoubtedly Christ, is portrayed as holding the keys of death and Hades. Aune points out that this image of Jesus holding the keys is derived from the Hellenistic conception of Hekate as the key bearer. Hekate was apparently a popular deity in Asia Minor during the Hellenistic and Roman times.<sup>967</sup> John unreservedly declares to his audience that the resurrected Christ holds the keys of death and Hades, not Hekate.

Another example of John's antagonistic tactic may be the way he describes God in Rev. 1:4. God is portrayed using the tripartite formula as "he who is and was and is coming" (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος). Such a threefold formula was common in addressing pagan deities.<sup>968</sup> According to Pausanias, the Peleïades, the female priestess of Zeus, were the first women to address Zeus by saying "Zeus was, Zeus is, Zeus will be, oh great Zeus" (Ζεὺς ἦν, Ζεὺς ἔστιν, Ζεὺς ἔσσεται, ὦ μέγας Ζεῦ).<sup>969</sup> Likewise, Plutarch records an inscription at the base of the statue of Athena, who was believed by the Egyptians to represent Isis. The Egyptian background of this example makes it particularly relevant here. The inscription read: "I am all that has happened, and is, and will be" (ἐγὼ εἰμι πᾶν τὸ γεγονὸς καὶ ὄν καὶ ἐσόμενον).<sup>970</sup> John appears to be familiar with these addresses. He employs a similar tripartite formula to underscore "God's true deity in contrast to the claim of others."<sup>971</sup> John's use of the three-fold formula is not in imitation of but in competition with the pagans who used similar phrases. We propose in this chapter that in Rev. 20 John employs the same strategy to antagonize the worshippers of Egyptian deities. The point is that if their names are not found in God's book of life then the fate they fear the most, the lake of fire, will be their lot.

John's use of the lake of fire imagery cannot inevitably be taken only as a means of putting down the pagans. The presence of a term loaded with significance affects the interpretation of Rev. 20. In fact, the presence of a term so closely associated with complete

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<sup>967</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 104. David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy, and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 354.

<sup>968</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 188.

<sup>969</sup> Pausanias, *Descr.* 10.12.10.

<sup>970</sup> Plutarch, *De Iside* 354c.

<sup>971</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 215.

and irreversible destruction leads the reader to conclude that the wicked, after being thrown into the lake, have no possibility of further afterlife.<sup>972</sup> The imagery of the lake of fire was not employed in order to evoke in John's first readers images of purgatorial fire cleansing sins. On the contrary, it conjured images of a terrible, sealed, and irreversible fate; one that was to be dreaded above all else.

This also explains some difficulties we have encountered in the text of Revelation. We observed previously that the lake of fire was the destiny of death and Hades. The notion that death or the abode of the dead (Hades) are tormented for eternity makes no sense. Death as a concept and the place where the dead are gathered cannot possibly be tormented. On the other hand, if the lake of fire refers to annihilation or elimination it makes perfect sense to say that death and Hades are thrown into the lake and their role is then ended.<sup>973</sup> This is also verified by the pronouncement from the throne in Rev. 21:4 that there will be no more death (ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι).

Moreover, we argued that Rev. 20:11-15 is a recapitulation of Rev. 20:7-10. In this case, the fate in the lake of fire is parallel to the fire that came from heaven and devoured those who attacked the beloved city (Rev. 20:9). If the lake of fire is not an actual place of eternal and perpetual torment but evokes images of a terrible destruction for John's readers, then the two images of Rev. 20:9 and Rev. 20:15 are not incompatible. Indeed, the image of fire coming down from heaven and devouring the nations is analogous to that of the unbelievers being thrown into and destroyed in the lake of fire.

We also noted that once a character in the plot of Revelation is thrown into this lake that character ceases to affect the plot of the book. As the beast, the false prophet, and then the devil fell into the lake of fire, their influence ceased and they never reappeared actively in the plot of the book. Likewise, death and Hades are eliminated from human experience when they are thrown into the lake of fire. Thus, one would expect the nations never to return. This makes the march of the nations and their kings into the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:24-26 all the more startling. Chapter 9 will deal with that problem.

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<sup>972</sup> Knight, *Revelation*, 133.

<sup>973</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 367; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 108; Roloff, *Revelation*, 232; Koester, *Revelation*, 781.

## Excursus: The conversion of the nations

The study of Rev. 19 and Rev. 20 yielded no evidence for the conversion of the nations. We found no indication that God called the nations to repentance in these chapters, and no suggestion that the nations repented and followed God during the millennium. Given the frequent references to the purity of the new Jerusalem and the absence of any evil from the city (Rev. 21:8, 27, 22:15), John expecting sinful nations to enter its premises is implausible. Are there any indications that the nations repented prior to the Parousia in Rev. 19?

Bauckham researched this question extensively in *The Climax of Prophecy*. His presumption for the conversion of the nations is the identification of the little book that John eats in Rev. 10:10 with the sealed book that the Lamb was able to take and open in Rev. 5:5. Bauckham argues that the process of unsealing the book (Rev. 6:1-8:1) releases a series of judgements on the world that fail to bring the nations to repentance. The judgements of the seals are followed by the judgements brought by the seven trumpets (Rev. 8:6-9:21). These judgements are more intense and affect a greater number of people, but they too fail to bring the nations to repentance (Rev. 9:20-21). In the interlude between the sixth and seventh seal, John heard the seven thunders speaking (ἐλάλησαν, Rev. 10:3). Bauckham understands this as a further intensification of God's judgement.<sup>974</sup> The content of the seven thunders is never disclosed because a voice from heaven prohibits John from writing these messages. This prohibition according to Bauckham suggests that further judgements are not necessary because judgements alone are ineffective in bringing the nations to repentance.<sup>975</sup> Instead, the angel gives the book to John to eat. The passage is constructed in such a way as to recall Ezekiel's prophetic call.<sup>976</sup> In this way, John is called once more to prophesy, this time specifically to peoples, nations, tongues, and kings (Rev. 10:11). The focus of the book undoubtedly shifts towards the nations from that point onwards, which is obvious from the increase in frequency of references to the nations.<sup>977</sup>

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<sup>974</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 259.

<sup>975</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 259. See also Farrer, *The Revelation*, 125.

<sup>976</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 214.

<sup>977</sup> Whereas prior to Rev. 10:11 the word ἔθνος occurs only three times (2:26; 5:9; 7:9) after this verse the word occurs twenty times (Rev. 10:11; 11:2; 9; 18; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6; 8; 15:3; 4; 16:19; 17:15; 18:3; 23; 19:15; 20:3; 8; 21: 24; 26; 22:2).

Endowed with a fresh mandate to prophesy to the nations, John, and by extension the community of the faithful Christians portrayed as the two witnesses in Rev. 11,<sup>978</sup> share their prophetic message. Whereas the previous judgements failed to bring the nations to repentance, the faithful ministry of the two witnesses eventually succeeds. It is not merely the judgements of the two witnesses that bring this about, but the judgements in conjunction with the testimony of the witnesses.<sup>979</sup> The repentance takes place once the nations see the vindication of the two witnesses and a massive earthquake devastates the city. The survivors “became fearful and gave glory to the God of heaven” (ἐμφοβοὶ ἐγένοντο καὶ ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, Rev. 11:13).

The identification of the small book that John ate in Rev. 10:10 with the sealed book of Rev. 5:5 is probable despite the fact that John uses the diminutive βιβλαρίδιον in Rev. 10:10 and the root word βιβλίον in Rev. 5:5. As Bauckham demonstrates, John does not appear to use diminutives in a form differently from the root words.<sup>980</sup> The removal of the seven seals in Rev. 6 and Rev. 8:1 is necessary for the opening the book that the Lamb received. Thus the process leads to the eventual revelation of the sealed book’s message. If the sealed book is not the same as that given to John to eat then the readers of Revelation are never informed of the sealed book’s content and purpose.

More problematic is the expression ἐμφοβοὶ ἐγένοντο in Rev. 11:13. Bauckham is correct in asserting that repentance is often described in terms of fearing God and giving him glory (see Rev. 14:7). However, the word commonly used to denote the fear, or respect for God is φοβέομαι (e.g. Gen. 22:12; Lev. 19:14; Ps. 21:24 LXX ref.; Isa. 59:19). The adjective ἐμφοβος usually appears in the context of actual fear. In the New Testament, ἐμφοβος is used primarily in Luke and Acts and in all instances refers to actual frightened individuals (Luke 24:5, 37; Acts 10:4; 24:25).<sup>981</sup> There is, however, an instance in Sir. 19:24 where ἐμφοβος refers to a

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<sup>978</sup> Rowland, *Revelation*, 642. Rowland writes “The witnesses prophesy (v. 3; cf. 1:5; 2:13; 3:14; 17:6) and thus offer exemplars of what John has been commanded to do (10:11).” See also Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 223; Osborne, *Revelation*, 420; Koester, *Revelation*, 497; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 573.

<sup>979</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 278.

<sup>980</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 243.

<sup>981</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 605.

God-fearing person.<sup>982</sup> This means that it is possible that Rev. 11:13 describes reverend fear of God on the part of the nations.

The proposal that Rev. 11:13 describes genuine conversion is further justified because John adds that those who became fearful (ἐμφοβοὶ ἐγένοντο) gave glory to the God of heaven (ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Osborne observes that in Rev. 15:4 the saints in heaven sing “who shall not fear you Lord and glorify your name?” (τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῇ, κύριε, καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;). This question is followed by the affirmation in the second part of the verse that “all nations will come and worship before you” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἔξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου).<sup>983</sup> The repentant nations, therefore, are characterized by the fear of God and by glorifying his name in language very similar to that used in Rev. 11:13. The conclusion that repentance is closely connected with the act of glorifying God can be further illustrated in Rev. 16:9. In this passage, sinners failed to repent and John specifically writes that they did not give glory to God (οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν, Rev. 16:9).<sup>984</sup> Evidently, this act of glorification is an integral part of repentance. Last, both notions of fearing God and glorifying him are once again revisited in the song at the marriage of the supper of the Lamb in Rev. 19:5-8. In the first part of the song, a call to worship is extended from the throne to all of God’s servants, who are described as fearing him (πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ [καὶ] οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν, Rev. 19:5). The response of the crowd also includes giving glory to God (καὶ δώσωμεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτῷ, Rev. 19:7). Osborne’s conclusion that in Revelation the phrase ‘fear God and give him glory’ are code words for repentance and conversion is certainly warranted.<sup>985</sup> Most scholars, with some notable exceptions, follow the view that repentance is intended in Rev. 11:13.<sup>986</sup>

Additionally, the description of the ministry of the two witnesses suggests that their goal is more than judgement. The two witnesses wear sackcloth (Rev. 11:3) “which indicates that they are calling people to repentance.”<sup>987</sup> The fate of the witnesses also closely parallels the fate

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<sup>982</sup> Contra Beale, who claims that ἐμφοβος is never used “in either the LXX or the NT in any expression analogous to ‘fear of the Lord’.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 605. Sir. 19:24 reads: κρείττων ἡττώμενος ἐν συνέσει ἐμφοβος ἢ περισσεύων ἐν φρονήσει καὶ παραβαίνων νόμον. (Better are the God-fearing who lack understanding than the highly intelligent who transgress the law, trans. NRSV)

<sup>983</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 535.

<sup>984</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 535; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 628.

<sup>985</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 535

<sup>986</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 628; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 361; Koester, *Revelation*, 504; Tonstad, *Revelation*, 167. Among the exceptions is Rowland, who assumes that the text records “a temporary recognition of God’s greatness.” Rowland, *Revelation*, 643.

<sup>987</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 108; Krodell, *Revelation*, 222.

of the crucified Christ. The witnesses are killed (Rev. 11:7), their bodies are displayed (Rev. 11:9), the inhabitants of the earth rejoice (Rev. 11:10, cf. Luke 23:35), after three and a half days they come back to life (Rev. 11:11 cf. Luke 24:46), and they then ascend to heaven in a cloud (Rev. 11:12, cf. Acts 1:9). Even though the city in Rev. 11 cannot be thought of as a specific place or city,<sup>988</sup> John says that the two witnesses were martyred where their Lord was crucified, a clear allusion to Jerusalem. All these allusions clearly attribute a redemptive purpose to the ministry of the two witnesses. As their death parallels the death of Christ, so does their prophetic message. John also gives a quantitative result in the response of the people to the preaching of the witnesses. A tenth of the city was killed, that is, seven thousand, and the rest, presumably sixty-three thousand, gave glory to God. Resseguie points out that this is a “reversal of Old Testament judgements in which nine-tenths are destroyed and one-tenth or a tithe is spared (Isa. 6:13; Amos 5:3).”<sup>989</sup>

Another passage relevant to the question of the conversion of the nations is Rev. 14. According to Bauckham Rev. 12-14 is a “fuller exposition of the conflict between the forces of evil and the witnessing church.”<sup>990</sup> The passage is relevant here because it describes a clear call for the nations to repent. Three angels deliver one positive and two negative warning messages to all nations. The positive message is called *εὐαγγέλιον αἰώνιον* (eternal gospel) and calls all to fear God, glorify him, and worship him as the creator (Rev. 14:7), the reason being the impending judgement of God. The second angel announces in advance the inevitable fall of Babylon that stands in opposition to God and, finally, the third angel describes the punishment of those who fail to heed God’s call and repent. The response of the nations to God’s calls for repentance is missing. However, the following narrative in Rev. 14:14-20 describes the coming judgement in terms of two harvests, the grain harvest (Rev. 14:14-16) and the grape harvest (Rev. 14:17-20). As noted in chapters 4.3 and 4.4, these represent the ingathering of the righteous and the judgement on the wicked respectively. Therefore, a partially positive response to the call for repentance by the three angels is recorded in the immediate narrative, at least implicitly.<sup>991</sup>

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<sup>988</sup> Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 110. The city represents “the whole realm in which oppression takes place” or as Kiddle puts it: “It is the city of this world order, the Earthly City, which included all peoples and tribes and tongues and nations.” Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 184-85.

<sup>989</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 165.

<sup>990</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 285.

<sup>991</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 293.

These findings are in stark contrast to what we saw in Rev. 19:11-20:15. Prior to the Parousia, the nations are called to repent, their response being sometimes positive and sometimes negative. John describes these responses both explicitly (Rev. 11:13) and implicitly (Rev. 14:14ff). John even includes the negative responses of sinners to repentance after the seven plagues (Rev. 16:9; 11; 21). However, after the Parousia and during the millennium no missionary activity occurs among the nations, and no record of their repentance is given. Preceding the Parousia, three series of sevenfold judgements are imposed on the earth with the purpose of bringing the people to repentance. No such judgements are issued during the millennium. The purpose of the judgement in Rev. 20:9 is purely to punish and destroy sinners. It seems that even the terrible, punitive discipline that was meant to bring sinners to repentance is worth applying to those who repeatedly rejected the past calls for repentance. All this demonstrates that the time for conversion cannot be during the millennium.<sup>992</sup>

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<sup>992</sup> The subject of the nations' repentance will be revisited in chapter 9.3.1. Once again, the conclusion will be drawn that those who enter the city repented prior to the Parousia and not during the millennium.



## 9. The March of the Nations

A marked difference in tone distinguishes Rev. 21 from the beginning of the book. There are no more beasts, dragons, sin, death, or pain. The absence of all evil, death, and pain portrays a world far beyond the realm of common human experience. Central to this world is the unhindered access of people to God. The new Jerusalem, God's holy city, descends from heaven like a bride for her husband (Rev. 21:2). The bride image identifies the new Jerusalem as God's people who are betrothed to him.<sup>993</sup> Immediately afterwards, a loud voice from heaven declares that the tabernacle of God will be with his people (Rev. 21:3). We will see that this implies that the new Jerusalem itself is the tabernacle of God, or his dwelling place.

In the ancient world divinity dwelt in a temple.<sup>994</sup> In Revelation's last pages, God will dwell among his people who are portrayed as a temple. The new Jerusalem is thus portrayed as a bride, as a city, and as God's temple. As a bride, the new Jerusalem symbolizes God's people. As a city, it is the final destination of the redeemed and their inheritance. As a temple, it is the final resting place of God's presence. This symbolic multivalence makes the last chapters rather complicated reading, but it also allows John to introduce the richness of the blessings of the new world in a concise way.<sup>995</sup>

In describing this new world and the new Jerusalem, John introduces the unanticipated motif of the nations entering the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:24-26. Nothing in the immediate context prepares the reader for such a turn of events. So far, our study had concluded that the nations in Rev. 19 and 20 were destroyed in their totality twice,<sup>996</sup> and no possibility of repentance was given them. In fact, we noted that the nations' prescribed fate in the lake of fire as well as the term second death both invoked images taken from Egyptian mythology and suggested permanent, irreversible destruction.

The theme of the nations bringing their glory and honour to God creates several questions that need to be addressed. First, the nations entering the new Jerusalem is set in a new world. John begins Rev. 21:1 with a new heaven and a new earth. In fact, John includes one of the few instances in Revelation where God speaks directly to affirm that all things are created

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<sup>993</sup> See Bauckham, *The Theology*, 136-40. The image of God's people as a bride betrothed to Jesus is also a common Pauline imagery, see 2 Cor. 11:2.

<sup>994</sup> Stevenson, *Power and Place*, 42.

<sup>995</sup> Bauckham describes the new Jerusalem in a different three-part formula. The new Jerusalem is a place, people, and the presence of God. Bauckham, *The Theology*, 132-43.

<sup>996</sup> First in Rev. 19:11-21 and then a second time in Rev. 20:7-15.

new in this world (Rev. 21:5). This creates the problem of where these nations come from. Are they remnants of the old world that somehow survived?<sup>997</sup> Are these nations those that allied with the beast and fought against the Lamb in Rev. 17:12-14, Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:7-10 or are there indications that these nations resisted the allure of Babylon, repented, and followed the Lamb?<sup>998</sup> If the latter is true and these nations are different, why are they introduced at this point in the narrative? Is there anything in Revelation that could prepare the reader for this event? Another important question is the theological significance of the nations entering through the open gates of the new Jerusalem. Is this an image of their repentance, their conversion, and their subsequent addition to God's family? or is it an image of worship?

Answers to these questions will help us resolve the problem of the fate of the nations. Before we begin to tackle these questions, it is important to divide John's final passages into workable, easier to study units. In some instances, the author has organized his message thematically and in others he has delivered it using elaborate chiasmic structures. Discerning John's patterns will help us discover what he sought to emphasize and will allow us to better understand his text.

## 9.1 Dividing the passage into constituent literary units

The final new world order in Revelation is described in Rev. 21:1-22:5. The first unit, Rev. 21:1-8 is usually thought of as the third and last subsection of Rev. 19:11-21:8.<sup>999</sup> The passage itself is organized into two subordinate units that, although covering the same subject, are made distinct by John because of the chiasmic structure by which he arranges his material. Rev. 21:1-5a according to Aune has the following structure:<sup>1000</sup>

- A. New (καινόν) heaven and new (καινήν) earth, v. 1a.
- B. First (πρῶτος) heaven and first (πρώτη) earth have passed away (ἀπῆλθαν), v. 1b.
- C. No longer any sea (θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι), v. 1c.

<sup>997</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 279. Caird claims that these are the nations that trampled the holy city in Rev. 11:2, were seduced by Babylon Rev. 18:3 and were finally reduced to subjection by the armies of Christ in Rev. 19:15. We noted earlier, however, that Rev. 19 describes the destruction of these armies not their submission; see Rev. 19:17-21.

<sup>998</sup> Possible examples for calls to repentance in Revelation are found in Rev. 14:6-7; 18:4.

<sup>999</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1113; Celia Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols: The new Jerusalem in Rv 21:1-22:5," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 78, no. 1-2 (1987): 109.

<sup>1000</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1114.

- D. The new Jerusalem comes down from heaven, v. 2
- D'. The tabernacle of God with people, v. 3-4a
- C'. There is no more death (θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι), v. 4b
- B'. The former things have passed (τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν), v. 4b
- A. "I make all things new" (καινά), v. 5a.

It is customarily assumed that a chiastic structure focuses on a "central strategic component"<sup>1001</sup> that often forms an important turning point in the passage.<sup>1002</sup> The descent of the new Jerusalem from heaven as well as the pronouncement that the dwelling of God will be with humanity, is found in the centre of the chiastic structure and seems to be John's focus. Aune also notes that John devotes most of his effort to describing this event. The newness of this world is also emphasized by the repetition of the adjective *καινός* four times in the span of five verses (Rev. 21:1, 2, 5).

The second subunit, Rev. 21:5-8, is an auditory revelation that comes directly from God. According to Aune, it is comprised of seven sayings, probably intentionally.<sup>1003</sup> The first is the declaration that "I make everything new", Rev. 21:5a which was the last part of the chiastic structure of the first subunit. This means this statement belongs to both subunits. The declaration closes the chiasm in Rev. 21:1-5 and simultaneously forms the first of the seven sayings of Rev. 21:5-8. John apparently uses the technique that A.Y. Collins calls interlocking.<sup>1004</sup>

The next passage, Rev. 21:9-22:5, contains a vision of the new Jerusalem, structurally related to Rev. 17:1-19:10 that contains the vision and punishment of Babylon. Giblin has demonstrated that the two passages form a paired angelic revelation.<sup>1005</sup> Both begin in nearly identical language with an angel who poured the seven bowls approaching John and who showed him the judgement of the great prostitute in Rev. 17:1-2 and the bride of the Lamb in

<sup>1001</sup> Brad McCoy, "Chiasmus: An Important Structural Device Commonly Found in Biblical Literature," *Chafer Theological Seminary* 9, no. 2 (2003): 18.

<sup>1002</sup> James L. Bailey, *Literary Forms in the New Testament* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 179.

<sup>1003</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1114. Rissi also observes that John includes seven sayings which he organizes in two groups of three and four. The first three are introduced with a formulae (i.e., *καὶ εἶπεν, καὶ λέγει, καὶ εἶπέν μοι*, Rev. 21:5-6), followed by the remaining four introduced without a formulae. Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 58.

<sup>1004</sup> Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, 16-19. Collins illustrates this technique in the way the seals transition to the trumpets in Rev. 8:1-5 and how the seventh seal introduces the opening of the trumpets.

<sup>1005</sup> Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," 487-504.

Rev. 21:9. In both cases, John is transported in the spirit to a desert in the case of Babylon (Rev. 17:3) and to a great mountain in the case of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10). Both passages end with John worshipping the angel that transmits the revelation only to be reprimanded by that angel and instructed to direct his worship to God (Rev. 19:10 cf. 22:8-9). The close lexical similarities between the two passages are aptly summarized by Aune.<sup>1006</sup>

The vision of the new Jerusalem can also be divided into two subordinate units. Aune points out that Rev. 21:11-21 describes the new Jerusalem externally, whereas Rev. 21:22-22:5 describes “various internal features of the new Jerusalem.”<sup>1007</sup> Besides the thematic change of describing the new Jerusalem first externally and then internally, John adds stylistic markers that reinforce such a division. The first subunit follows a clear chiasmic structure:

- A. [Jerusalem] has the glory of God, (ἔχουσιν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ) v.11
- B. Has twelve gates (ἔχουσα πυλῶνας δώδεκα) v. 12
- C. The wall has twelve foundations (ἔχων θεμελίους δώδεκα) v.14
- D. John’s otherworldly companion had a golden measuring reed to measure the city, the gates and its wall (ἵνα μετρήσῃ τὴν πόλιν καὶ τοὺς πυλῶνας αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ τεῖχος αὐτῆς.) v.15
- D’. He measured the city and the wall (ἐμέτρησεν τὴν πόλιν ... καὶ ἐμέτρησεν τὸ τεῖχος) v.16-17
- C’. The foundations are made of precious stones (οἱ θεμέλιοι τοῦ τείχους τῆς πόλεως παντὶ λίθῳ τιμίῳ) v. 19-20
- B’. The twelve gates are made of single pearls (οἱ δώδεκα πυλῶνες...) v.21
- A’. The glory of God lightens it and the Lamb is its lamp. (ἡ γὰρ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐφώτισεν αὐτήν) v.23

It is also noteworthy that the first three parts of the chiasmic structure (A,B,C) describe what the city has (glory, gates, foundations) whereas the corresponding parts (C’,B’,A’) describe the nature or the function of these parts. Thus, A tells us that the city has the glory of God and A’ tells that this glory illuminates the city. B informs the reader that the city has twelve gates

<sup>1006</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1144-45.

<sup>1007</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1147. See also Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 237.

whereas B' explains that each gate is made of a single pearl. Last, C tells that the wall has 12 foundations whereas C' names the precious stones that function as the foundations of the wall.

Structurally, Rev. 21:23 that describes the glory of God illuminating the new Jerusalem seems to be part of the chiastic construction of the first subunit corresponding to v. 11 and the glory of God that the new Jerusalem has. The same verse, however, is also part of the second subunit, dealing with the internal features of the new Jerusalem. Just as the declaration of Rev. 21:5 belonged to the chiastic structure of Rev. 21:1-5 and was also part of the next subunit in Rev. 21:5-8, Rev. 21:23 functions as a transition. Rev. 21:23 is also virtually repeated at the end of the second subunit in Rev. 22:5.<sup>1008</sup> Its repetition creates a sort of *inclusio* (or “circularity” according to Thompson) that marks the boundaries of the subunit.<sup>1009</sup>

The central point of the chiastic structure is probably the focal point of the unit. The measuring of Jerusalem is right in the middle. The numbers produced from the measuring are multiples of 12. It may be significant that although the angel proceeded with the intention of measuring the city, gates, and the wall, he made no record of the measuring of the gates.<sup>1010</sup> Such an omission brings the gates into focus. Indeed, in the second subordinate unit the gates play a significant role in allowing unimpeded access by the nations to the city, irrespective of the time of day (Rev. 21:25).

The problem of the nations entering the new Jerusalem is focused almost exclusively on the second subordinate unit of the vision of the new Jerusalem. This is where the exegesis of this chapter will focus. However, Rev. 21:1-8 is very relevant to the problem as well, not only because it describes a world of direct intimacy between God and his people, as bridegroom and bride, but also because of the dominant theme of newness that it introduces. Everything is new in the world; the heavens, the earth, and Jerusalem. The “newness” of this new world is directly related to the identity of the nations. If the heavens and the earth are new, created again from the beginning then this seems to leave no room for the nations as remnants from the past.

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<sup>1008</sup> Pilchan Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: A Study of Revelation 21-22 in the Light of Its Background in Jewish Tradition*, 129 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 293; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1169; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 258.

<sup>1009</sup> On John's use of the principle of circularity, see Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 45-46.

<sup>1010</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1147.

## 9.2 The new heaven and the new earth

Rev. 21 begins with a new world. The significance or degree of the “newness” of this new world is debated. Is this world the old world renovated, or a brand-new world created by God? McNicol argues against a completely new creation for several reasons. First, when John in Rev. 21:1, 5 speaks of new heavens and earth, he alludes to Isa. 43:19, particularly 65:17. McNicol notes that Isaiah does not envision a wholly new creation, expecting a period in which creation will conform to “the original intent of the Creator.”<sup>1011</sup> McNicol further argues that the statements regarding new heavens and new earth, as well as those envisioning the disappearance of the old earth and heavens in Rev. 20:11 were not meant as literal statements or cosmological predictions “of total replacement of the cosmos” but, like other images in Revelation, should be understood symbolically.<sup>1012</sup> The conditions and John’s description of the new earth also suggest to McNicol that the new earth is not entirely new. John emphasizes the new Jerusalem, describing a return to Eden, and a pilgrimage of the nations, all of which are themes that have “precedents in the biblical story.”<sup>1013</sup>

It is clear that John in Rev. 21:1 alludes to Isa. 65:17 where the LXX contains the identical phrase οὐρανὸς καινὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καινὴ.<sup>1014</sup> It is also possible that Isaiah did not envision the brand-new creation of a new heaven and a new earth with the total destruction of the old one in using this phrase. However, one cannot conclude that the views of both prophets on the new world were identical simply because John alludes to Isaiah. When John borrows a passage from a source, he does not necessarily slavishly follow its original meaning but allows his creativity or his prophetic authority to reinterpret it. We saw in previous chapters that John borrowed HB imagery for his description of the coming of the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:11-21 and the effects of the war.<sup>1015</sup> It was also pointed out that John reworked these passages to make them more universal in the effects of the destruction. In interpreting John’s relationship to his sources, it is not sufficient to list the similarities; the differences must also be explored.

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<sup>1011</sup> Allan J. McNicol, “All Things New,” *Christian Studies* 21 (2005): 46.

<sup>1012</sup> McNicol, “All Things New,” 47-48.

<sup>1013</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, 98.

<sup>1014</sup> The only difference is that the LXX uses the nominative whereas John’s phrase is in the accusative.

<sup>1015</sup> See chapter 3.

Differences between texts indicate places at which the author of the allusion (John) may in fact seek to make a particular point.<sup>1016</sup>

One striking difference between John and Isaiah at this point is that in Isaiah's world there is death. Isaiah envisions a world without infant mortality, and one in which people will die at a great age, although people will die (Isa. 65:20).<sup>1017</sup> John specifically claims however that in God's new world there will be no death any longer (Rev. 21:4). In fact, death and Hades were destroyed in the previous chapter in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14). This already shows that John's new world is different from Isaiah's. John felt free to rework his source material and fashion it so as to fit his purposes best. Indeed, John's understanding of some HB texts "may have been surprising to an Old Testament readership."<sup>1018</sup> Reading the prophecy of Isa. 65 and that of Rev. 21 one cannot help but conclude that John envisioned a far more radically different new world than Isaiah did.

There is yet another problem with equating Isaiah's expectations with those of Revelation, even though John may be using them as source material. This problem is related to the genre of the books. Jewish literature in the Hellenistic period and later had two competing traditions about the future hope. One tradition was focused "on the restoration of Israel, and the attendant transformation of this world."<sup>1019</sup> The other tradition was developed in apocalyptic books and anticipated the destruction of this world.<sup>1020</sup> This cosmic destruction can be found for example in 4 Ezra 7:29-30, in which the prophet expected the reign of the Messiah to last for four hundred years after which all would die, and the earth would descend into a primeval silent state for seven days. That state is described "as it was at the first beginnings".<sup>1021</sup> It will be followed by judgement (4 Ezra 7:33) and recompense for the righteous and the wicked.

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<sup>1016</sup> While discussing the impressive similarities between Revelation and Ezekiel, Moyise observes the significant differences. "By firmly making the reader think of Ezekiel's visions and then confronting him or her with drastic changes, the reader is forced to stop and ask what is going on." Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 82.

<sup>1017</sup> As Westermann observes "even in the era of salvation death still remains." Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40 - 66*, trans. David Stalker, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1969), 409.

<sup>1018</sup> Beale, *John's Use*, 43.

<sup>1019</sup> John J. Collins, "Not One World but Two. The Future in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *Religions* 10, no. 4 (April 2019): 233, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10040233>.

<sup>1020</sup> Collins, "Not One World but Two".

<sup>1021</sup> 4 Ezra 7:30. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra." (Trans. B. Metzger.)

Although creating work is not mentioned specifically, the redeemed will be located opposite to the furnace of Hell “in the Paradise of delight” (4 Ezra 7:36, trans by B. Metzger).<sup>1022</sup>

Isaiah is a classical prophet whereas John is apocalyptic. Classical prophecy and Isa. 65:17ff in particular expected the eschaton to take place within the range of human history.<sup>1023</sup> On the other hand, apocalyptic prophets expected “a transcendent eschatology that looks for retribution beyond the bounds of history.”<sup>1024</sup> One cannot simply assume that Revelation follows Isaiah’s scenario for the transformation of this world. Indeed, the language of Revelation seems to suggest that John envisioned the destruction of this world, which would be replaced by the new creation.<sup>1025</sup> According to Collins, this view of the future is “inherited in the New Testament, most strikingly in the book of Revelation.”<sup>1026</sup>

McNicol’s second argument is that Revelation is a symbolic book and thus the “new heaven and new earth” of Rev. 21:1 should not be read as a “literal statement.”<sup>1027</sup> After all, earth and heaven fled from God’s presence in Rev. 20:11 “yet in 20:13 the sea gives up its dead – something impossible to comprehend if one is reading the text in a literal, chronological sequence.”<sup>1028</sup> McNicol continues that the “emphasis in Rev. 21:1 is not on giving up on earth, but on the qualitative difference between the regiment of this age and that of the age to come.”<sup>1029</sup>

Revelation is clearly a symbolic book. However, Revelation’s symbolism should not lead us to abandon attention to the wording of the text. In Rev. 20:11-15, John describes the final judgement of the dead. When McNicol asks how come the sea gives up its dead in Rev. 20:13 when earth and heaven have fled before God’s presence in Rev. 20:11, he objects to an overly literal interpretation to which probably nobody subscribes. Roloff correctly points out that “it would be superfluous to want to know where the throne of God stands after heaven is

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<sup>1022</sup> Similar cosmic destruction is also found in the Testament of Moses. There the coming of God is accompanied by earthquakes, the mountains brought low, the loss of light from the sun, the moon and the stars. The sea will retire into the abyss and the rivers will vanish. Test. Mos. 10:3-6. Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 116.

<sup>1023</sup> Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 115.

<sup>1024</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 11.

<sup>1025</sup> Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 115-16.

<sup>1026</sup> Collins, “Not One World but Two,” 1.

<sup>1027</sup> McNicol, “All Things New,” 47.

<sup>1028</sup> McNicol, “All Things New,” 48.

<sup>1029</sup> McNicol, “All Things New,” 48.



no more.”<sup>1030</sup> And Mounce on similar lines observes that it “is a bit pedantic to argue that verse 13 is out of sequence since resurrection (vs 13) must precede judgement (vs 12).”<sup>1031</sup> There is a good reason to understand the phrase “the sea gave up its dead” symbolically, referring to a resurrection. However, it does not seem to me that McNicol has established a good reason why we should understand “new heaven and new earth” as referring to the same earth simply renovated. McNicol attempts to do so by pointing out the three themes that John uses in describing the new Jerusalem with earlier precedents in the biblical story. These are the emphasis on the new Jerusalem, the return to Eden, and a pilgrimage of the nations to join God’s people.<sup>1032</sup>

These themes, however, may be understood better as suggesting a totally new creation. The fact that John uses notions such as the garden of Eden should not be taken as an argument against a wholly new creation in the new age. John’s allusions to Eden evoke the story of the creation of the world and should therefore be taken as evidence that he expected his new world to result from God’s creative acts. Among the prominent motifs of Genesis and creation are the twelve foundational stones of the city (Rev. 21:19-20). These are often associated with the priestly garments and the twelve tribes, but also allude to “paradisiacal traditions, since the high priest’s breastplate was said to include stones from Havilah, a place associated with Eden.”<sup>1033</sup> Eden, the river of life and the tree of life also feature prominently in Rev. 22:1-5, three subjects that clearly evoke the first creation story.<sup>1034</sup> Last, a detail that has been overlooked is that God himself makes the pronouncement of the new world, which is incredibly rare in Revelation. The only other reference to God’s speech in Revelation is in Rev. 1:8.<sup>1035</sup> God’s words were the medium by which the first creation came into existence (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 26; Ps. 33:6). In consequence, God’s speech in Rev. 21:5 should be understood as performative, an act of creation.

Contrary to McNicol, the new Jerusalem best represents the newness of this world. The fact that the city is called Jerusalem is not a reference to the earthly Jerusalem renovated, but a completely new city that descends from heaven (Rev. 21:2, 10). The glorification of Jerusalem

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<sup>1030</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 232.

<sup>1031</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 366.

<sup>1032</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, 98.

<sup>1033</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 818.

<sup>1034</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 603-5.

<sup>1035</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1114.

and the rebuilding of the temple was a positive expectation in prophetic HB books as well as pre-Roman and Roman era literature in Palestine and the diaspora.<sup>1036</sup> Many of these books envisioned the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but Revelation does not view the earthly Jerusalem favourably, never giving the name Jerusalem to the earthly city in Revelation.<sup>1037</sup> The earthly Jerusalem is referenced in Rev. 11:8 but it is called “spiritually” Sodom and Egypt (Rev. 11:8). Hence the need for a completely new city coming down from heaven.<sup>1038</sup> The new Jerusalem is defined by the adjective *καινή* as are the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>1039</sup> In Jerusalem’s case John evidently does not speak of a renovation of the old city but the creation and the transportation of a completely new city to earth.<sup>1040</sup> In doing so, he maintains the Christian tradition that the author of Hebrews followed, in which God is the craftsman and creator of that city (πόλιν ἥς τεχνίτης καὶ δημιουργὸς ὁ θεός, Heb. 11:10).

Considerable discussion has concentrated on the fact that John does not use the adjective *νέος* to describe the heavens and the earth, but rather *καινός*.<sup>1041</sup> Greek has two words that describe something new; *νέος* and *καινός*. Although they are sometimes used interchangeably, they are semantically distinct from each other.<sup>1042</sup> *νέος* means something that is new by virtue of being young, recent or fresh.<sup>1043</sup> The word *καινός* however, emphasizes something that is new in nature, unworn.<sup>1044</sup> Because John uses *καινός*, some scholars argue that he does not mean a wholly new creation “totally other than the present one in origin or time” but a universe “radically renewed” that “stands in continuity with the present one.”<sup>1045</sup> Wall, for instance, claims that the new order John envisions is not a “‘brand new’ reality; neither does Christ’s Parousia mark the end of human history. Rather, it consummates the renewal of the old

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<sup>1036</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 290, 292-93.

<sup>1037</sup> Roloff notes that the word Jerusalem appears three times in Revelation, which refers in all cases to God’s eschatological city, never to the earthly Jerusalem. Roloff, *Revelation*, 235.

<sup>1038</sup> 2 Bar. 4:2-3 also clearly distinguishes between the earthly Jerusalem and God’s eschatological city. See Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 118.

<sup>1039</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 813.

<sup>1040</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 55. Likewise, Reddish points out that “obviously John is not talking about the rebuilding of the earthly city of Jerusalem. This is a *new* Jerusalem that he sees.” (Emphasis his.) Reddish, *Revelation*, 402.

<sup>1041</sup> David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1-22.5*, JSNTSup 238 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 37.

<sup>1042</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1040.

<sup>1043</sup> J. Behm, “νέος,” in *TDNT*, 1976, 4:896-901.

<sup>1044</sup> J. Behm, “καινός,” in *TDNT*, 1976, 3:447-57; Joseph Thayer, “καινός,” in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1886, 318.

<sup>1045</sup> Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 268.

order.”<sup>1046</sup> This position essentially understands the Parousia of Christ as not destroying the old world. The world continues and Christ’s kingdom is established in history; only this time the “creation will work in keeping with the original intent of the Creator.”<sup>1047</sup>

Adverting to John’s word choice, Lee concludes that John “does not mean the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present one in origin or time, but the creation of a universe which, though it has been gloriously and radically renewed in quality or nature, stands in continuity with the present one.”<sup>1048</sup> The word *καινός* means something new in nature.<sup>1049</sup> How come then can Lee conclude that John used this word to imply “continuity”? It appears that those who reject the notion that the new world of Revelation is completely new appeal to what *νέος* means but fail to appreciate the full weight of the newness *καινός* carries. The word *καινός*—more than *νέος*—emphasizes the newness of the new world. Wall may claim that *καινός* does not reflect a “brand new reality”<sup>1050</sup> but in fact it reflects a “brand new reality” more explicitly than *νέος* since it refers specifically to the nature of that reality.<sup>1051</sup> *νέα* earth may be a recent youthful earth, but *καινή* earth is a brand new one. The semantic difference is clearly illustrated in Jesus’s parable of the wineskins. New wine (*οἶνος νέος*) is kept in brand-new wine skins (*ἄσκοις καινούς*) (Mark 2:22). As the new wine ferments and expands so do the new skins, are able to expand since they are unused, unworn, and unstretched. Used wine skins, by contrast, were hard and less flexible because they had lost their elasticity. Using them would run the risk of the wine skin rupturing and wasting the wine.<sup>1052</sup>

The expression “new heavens and new earth” also appears in 2 Pet. 3:13. Second Peter, a Christian document<sup>1053</sup> written about the time of Revelation, speaks of the divine judgement in apocalyptic terms. According to 2 Pet. 3:10, the day of the Lord will bring the destruction of

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<sup>1046</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 247.

<sup>1047</sup> McNicol, “All Things New,” 46.

<sup>1048</sup> Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 268.

<sup>1049</sup> Behm, “*καινός*.”

<sup>1050</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 247.

<sup>1051</sup> Behm, “*καινός*.”

<sup>1052</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 234; William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*, The Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1975), 61. See also Culpepper, *Mark*, 88-89.

<sup>1053</sup> It is notoriously difficult to date early Christian documents with much precision. Bauckham observes that 2 Peter has been dated in every decade from 60 to 160 AD with the exception perhaps of 70 to 80 AD. He does not think that 2 Peter is the most recent book in the New Testament and places its time of composition between 80 and 90 AD. Richard Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 157-58. The precise dating of 2 Peter is not relevant here. What is relevant is that it is a document that contains Christian traditions at roughly the time of Revelation.

the heavens that will pass away with a roar (οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζήδον παρελεύσονται), and the elements, possibly meaning the heavenly bodies,<sup>1054</sup> will be dissolved in the heat (καυσούμενα λυθήσεται). This dissolution is repeated in 2 Pet. 3:12 prior to the promise of new heavens and new earth (καινοὺς δὲ οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καινὴν, 2 Pet. 3:13), also a passage emphasizing “the radical discontinuity between the old and the new”.<sup>1055</sup>

Clearly καινός denotes something new in its very essence. Any suggestion of “continuity” is not part of the semantic domain of καινός and is not found in the context of Revelation either.<sup>1056</sup> We can argue that the creation John envisions is not *ex nihilo*. After all, it appears that God uses the pre-existing earth to recreate the new one. Still, the language of complete destruction is very clear in Revelation and the recreation comes about after the old cosmos has been destroyed.<sup>1057</sup>

The context of Revelation 21 suggests re-creation rather than a renewal in history. The destruction of the world that started with the various judgements and plagues culminates in the second coming.<sup>1058</sup> Earlier, it was argued that the second coming of Christ in Rev. 19:11-21 devastates this world and its sinful inhabitants.<sup>1059</sup> Rev. 20:1 showed that the second coming leaves the world in a state of chaos; as an abyss resembling the earth before creation.<sup>1060</sup> Its only inhabitant is Satan, who is bound. No evidence of meaningful life on earth seems to be present for the whole duration of the millennium. After their brief reappearance, the nations are destroyed (Rev. 20:7-10).<sup>1061</sup> In Rev. 20:11, John mentions the removal of the first heaven and the first earth, which is apparently a requirement for the creation of the new heaven and the new

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<sup>1054</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 316.

<sup>1055</sup> Bauckham, *2 Peter, Jude*, 326. Bauckham also speaks of “renewal” in this passage and not the “abolition of creation”. However, his definition of renewal is similar to Beale’s in the sense that the old cosmos will be destroyed. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1040. Deutsch claims that “Second Temple Judaism ... considers that the new creation will occur only after cosmic destruction. Such a destruction is necessary, for order has become dis-order in his [John’s] community’s experience.” Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 125-26.

<sup>1056</sup> The Greek language has equivalent words for renewing: ἀνακαινόω and ἀνανεόω. I disagree with Koester who accepts that the word καινός emphasizes “the difference from what has gone before” while claiming that the word also “encompasses some continuity, like the same person being given a new name (2:17; 3:12).” Koester, *Revelation*, 794. In both examples he cites, the adjective καινός specifically defines the name not the person.

<sup>1057</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1040.

<sup>1058</sup> Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 37.

<sup>1059</sup> See chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>1060</sup> See chapter 5.

<sup>1061</sup> See chapter 7.

earth,<sup>1062</sup> because “the first creation has been dissolved the second has been established to replace it.”<sup>1063</sup> It is clear that at least in a literal sense “John envisions nothing less than the complete removal of the old order to make room for a qualitatively new creative act of God.”<sup>1064</sup>

Herein lies the value of the previous discussion to the question of the fate of the nations. The nations were part of the old order in the earlier chapters of Revelation. If that old order has disappeared and the world has been recreated, then it stands to reason that the nations that enter the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21 cannot be the sinful nations of the old order.

In the previous chapters, it was concluded that the nations of Rev. 19 and 20 were destroyed completely and that no wicked survivors were left on earth. In Rev. 21, the notion of a new world also excludes the possibility of surviving nations living outside the new Jerusalem. While this does not resolve the problem of the nations marching into the new Jerusalem later in the chapter, it makes the option of these nations being survivors of past battles or populations that did not participate in them very unlikely. Anything sinful, or part of the old order has been removed. The new world is new (*καινός*) in its very essence.

Another relevant question pertaining to the new world and the fate of the nations is whether the lake of fire is still part of it. The seventh and final saying of God from the throne in Rev. 21:8 seems to suggest that the lake of fire exists concurrently with the new creation.<sup>1065</sup> In addition, although the lake of fire is not mentioned, in three other instances (Rev. 21:27; 22:3a; 15) groups of evil people or accursed things are either denied entrance to or said to be outside the city. How can these statements be reconciled with the notion of new heavens and new earth (in Rev. 21:1) as well as the statement in Rev. 21:5 that God will make “all things new”?

Some, like Rissi, understand these verses as suggesting another place where the wicked will be located (i.e., outside the city and inside the lake of fire). This interpretation is

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<sup>1062</sup> Whether the dissolution of the world order takes place at the second coming or at the end of the millennium is irrelevant. See discussion in chapter 7.5.

<sup>1063</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1039. See also Rowland, *Revelation*, 720.

<sup>1064</sup> Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 38. Roloff adds that “as the Creator’s word had caused the world to come into being out of nothing, so does its encounter with the Judge cause it to fall into nothing – there is no longer and place for it.” Roloff, *Revelation*, 231. Roloff takes the most extreme position that God’s recreation of the world, as in Genesis, is out of nothing. Others like Stefanovic understand the new creation as “a re-creation ‘of existing elements’ rather than ‘a creation ex nihilo’”. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 586. Similarly, Beale speaks of renewal but notes that “renewal does not mean that there will be no literal destruction of the old cosmos.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1040.

<sup>1065</sup> Rissi shares this view in *The Future of the World*, 74.

incompatible with the creation of a new world order. In the new heavens and new earth there is no death (Rev. 21:4), yet the fate of the sinners in the lake of fire is specifically defined as the second death (Rev. 20:14; 21:8). Rowland dismisses the notion that this means the wicked residing outside the walls of the new Jerusalem, claiming that such “a comment manifests a pedantic literalism that does not do full justice to the poetic license of apocalypse.”<sup>1066</sup> Osborne suggests that the key to understanding this passage is that it addresses the readers of the book.<sup>1067</sup> He contends that the text does not describe the situation in the newly created world, but an event that has already taken place in Rev. 20:13-15 where the unbelievers were cast into the lake of fire. The point is to exhort its readers to live accordingly so as to avoid such a fate.<sup>1068</sup> Likewise, the warning of Rev. 21:27 excluding from the city those whose names are not in the book of life is also associated with the past judgement in the lake of fire because there too those not in the book of life met their terrible fate in the fiery lake (see Rev. 20:15; 21:27). Beale here makes the same argument Osborne did concerning Rev. 21:8. He understands that the passage has a rhetorical function “to warn the people in the present by describing the final outcome of their choices and actions.”<sup>1069</sup> Beale also agrees that the unrighteous “do not reside within the borders of the new cosmos” because God’s blessings saturate “the entire new creation.”<sup>1070</sup> He does, however, understand their existence still in spatial terms in claiming that they suffer “outside the geography of the new universe.”<sup>1071</sup>

The reference to the wicked outside the new Jerusalem should be understood in temporal terms. When John mentions the exclusion of the wicked from the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21:8, 27, he does not move spatially outside the limits of the new Jerusalem but temporally to when the wicked meet their demise in the lake of fire. His goal is to urge his audience not to follow a

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<sup>1066</sup> Rowland, *Revelation*, 722. Ladd also rejects the notion that the sinners are still in the new world outside the walls of the city on similar grounds. Commenting on Rev. 21:27, he claims that “the flexibility of apocalyptic language allows John to use contemporary earthly idiom to describe future eschatological situations.” Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 285.

<sup>1067</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 740. See also Roloff, *Revelation*, 238.

<sup>1068</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 740. On the parenetic function of Rev. 21:8, see also Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 91-92; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 110; Boring, *Revelation*, 217.

<sup>1069</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1102.

<sup>1070</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1061. Lee also argues this in claiming that “there are no evil ones who remain even outside the new Jerusalem because they are thrown into the lake of fire.” Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 277.

<sup>1071</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1061. His position arises from his understanding that when death and Hades are thrown into the lake of fire, this action does not necessarily mean the eradication of death (though he considers it a possibility; see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1034) but rather some form of replacement of the “temporary bonds of ‘death and Hades’” by the “permanent bonds of the lake of fire”. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1035.

course that will be to their detriment. To borrow Thompson's language, "time" in Revelation can "be understood as a 'topographical arrangement in space'".<sup>1072</sup> When John speaks spatially of the lake of fire, he transports the reader temporally to the time of the sinner's destruction. Roloff explains the parenetic function of Rev. 21:27 so as to demonstrate the temporal dimensions: "...whoever does not *now* [emphasis mine] risk full, undivided obedience and engages in spurious compromises with the evil powers *will not* [emphasis mine] be admitted to the city of God."<sup>1073</sup> This interpretation also confirms our previous conclusion that the lake of fire does not presuppose the constant torment of the sinners but their annihilation. It is also in harmony with Rev. 20:14, which suggests the elimination of the role of death and Hades.<sup>1074</sup>

John's caveat, placed right after the inclusion of the nations and their kings in the new Jerusalem, affirms his particularistic understanding of salvation.<sup>1075</sup> Thus, salvation in Revelation cannot possibly be thought of as limitless and universal. It exists side by side, though perhaps not temporally, with the punishment of the wicked. Furthermore, the parenetic tone used to address the readers suggests that John attempted to persuade his audience to repent now. The implication is that the eternal fate of John's readers is being decided by choices that take place in history. The conclusion is that not all will be saved, and the choices that will affect the fate of John's readers take place in the present age.

To sum up, the theme of the new creation turns a new page in the narrative of Revelation. The sealed fate of the nations defeated in the final battle is reinforced by the image of a world new in its very essence. The old things belong to the past. The lake of fire and those confined in it have passed away, together with the old heaven and earth.<sup>1076</sup> By implication, the nations that enter the new Jerusalem ought to be part of that new world order. They simply cannot be remnants of the past. In that new world, the nations march into the new Jerusalem and, together with their kings, offer their honour and glory. Next, we will attempt to determine the theological significance of this pilgrimage.

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<sup>1072</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 84.

<sup>1073</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 246.

<sup>1074</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 781.

<sup>1075</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 313 n. 100.

<sup>1076</sup> Alternatively, those who understand that the lake of fire is eternal, such as Beale, view it as a punishment confined in another universe. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1061. Both these views reject the possibility of any contact between the believers and the wicked in the new world.

### 9.3 The nations enter the new Jerusalem

The image of the nations coming to Jerusalem offering gifts to God figures prominently in Jewish literature, being part of the Jewish eschatological expectation that God and Israel would eventually be vindicated. In most cases, a theophany or an eschatological war<sup>1077</sup> defeats the nations who in consequence submit themselves to God (as in Isa.66:15; Zech. 14:12-19; Syb. Or. 3:671-674; 710-723; Ps. Sol. 17:21-25, 31). Defeat in a war suggests some sort of coercion. When the eschatological war is not mentioned, the prophets who describe the events usually insert a warning that those who do not comply will face severe consequences (Isa. 49:26; 60:12; Ps. Sol. 17:34-35).

A frequent theme in many such passages is the light or glory of God guiding this pilgrimage. This is especially frequent in Isaiah, extending throughout the entire book.<sup>1078</sup> In Isa. 2:5, the house of Jacob is invited to come and "...walk in the light of the LORD!" (NRSV). Even though the invitation is addressed to Israel it "was clearly composed as an invitation to join the nations' procession to 'the mountain of 'the house of YHWH,' as indicated by the lexical associations between 2:5 and 2:3."<sup>1079</sup> In Isa. 49:6, the servant of the Lord becomes a light for the gentiles, bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth. Isa. 60:1, 3, 11, a passage John clearly alludes to in Rev. 21:23-25, also uses light as guidance for the nations. The Sibylline Oracles also contain the idea of nations bringing gifts to Israel. They too speak of light in the eschatological kingdom of God. In Sib. Or. 3:787, the Sibyl claims that "He [the creator] will dwell in you. You will have immortal light".<sup>1080</sup> Although the Sibyl does not speak of light guiding the nations, as in Rev. 21:23, the light of the city is provided directly by God. Additionally, while the Sibyl first speaks of a kingdom (Sib. Or. 3:767), the same figure later addresses that kingdom as if she was a maiden, a clear reference to Jerusalem (Sib. Or. 3:785). Last, Ps. Sol. 17:31 claims that nations from the ends of the earth will come "to see his glory."<sup>1081</sup> Light is not specifically mentioned in the psalm, but glory is, a detail corresponding to Rev. 21:23 in which the glory of God illuminates the new Jerusalem.

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<sup>1077</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, 104.

<sup>1078</sup> Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 219.

<sup>1079</sup> Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, 90.

<sup>1080</sup> Collins, "Sibylline Oracles," 379. (Trans. by John J. Collins).

<sup>1081</sup> R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 667. (Trans. by R. B. Wright.)



In most of the passages above, the temple plays a significant role; predictably so, since the pilgrimage of the nations relates to worship, which was centred on the temple. In Isa. 2:2, the establishment of the mountain of the Lord as chief among mountains may indicate God's dominance over the kingdoms of the world. The temple of God was also established on that mountain. In this passage, the nations do not bring any presents to God, save their desire to be instructed in his ways (Isa. 2:3) and place themselves under his judicial authority (Isa. 2:7).

The temple imagery is even more pronounced in Isa. 60. The nations that come to Jerusalem bring with them Zion's sons and daughters from afar (Isa. 60:4). Besides the return of the exiles, the nations also bring wealth, and animals (Isa. 60:5-7). The camels are mentioned as carrying gold and incense and the rams are offered as sacrifices. The temple and the altar are specifically mentioned since this is where the sacrifices are offered (Isa. 60:7).<sup>1082</sup> The nations bring free labour and rebuild the walls of the city. They also foster the return of the exiles and bring monetary gifts. The gates are perpetually open so that the tribute will flow constantly (Isa. 60:11).

In Zech. 14, the survivors of the nations that attacked Jerusalem will go to the city annually to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. This pilgrimage does not suggest a genuine conversion, as evidence suggests that this pilgrimage is imposed on the nations.<sup>1083</sup> The Feast of Tabernacles, a time when sacrifices were offered in abundance,<sup>1084</sup> was one of the three pilgrimage festivals that Jews were to attend (Deut. 16:16).<sup>1085</sup> Although Zechariah does not mention the temple specifically, he does speak of the altar and the sacrifices offered by the pilgrims (Zech. 14:20-21).

The temple also appears prominently in the Sib. Or. version of the nations' pilgrimage. According to Sibyl, God's temple will be loaded with wealth that will attract the envy and anger of the nations (Sib. Or. 3:657-668). God's judgement will thwart their plans and they will fail (Sib. Or. 3:671-700). All the while, God's people will be protected around the temple (Sib. Or. 3:703). This protection will make the nations realize how much God loves his people and prompt them to entreat God by sending gifts to the temple (Sib. Or. 3:718) and abandoning

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<sup>1082</sup> Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 221.

<sup>1083</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 316. First, because it occurs after the conclusive defeat of the nations' armies and second, because those who may decide not to make the pilgrimage are threatened by drought and plagues, see Zech. 14:12-15 and 16-19. The withholding of rain may indicate the withdrawal of God's blessings. Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Minor Prophets*, 10:625.

<sup>1084</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 140.

<sup>1085</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 129-30.

idolatry (Sib. Or. 3:722-723). At the eschatological kingdom, people from every land will bring incense and gifts to God's house, which will stand as the only temple of God (Sib. Or. 3:772-774).

The temple theme is also present in Tobit. In his prayer, Tobit exhorts his fellow countrymen to praise God and proclaim his greatness. The goal is that God's tabernacle will be built again (ἵνα πάλιν ἡ σκηνὴ αὐτοῦ οἰκοδομηθῇ, Tob. 13:11 LXX). The pilgrimage of the nations then takes place when the nations come from afar carrying gifts in their hands to present to the king of heaven. In the same prayer, Tobit prophesies the rebuilding of Jerusalem with precious stones, and the walls, towers, and outer fortifications (τὰ τείχη σου καὶ οἱ πύργοι καὶ οἱ προμαχώνες, Tob. 13:17 LXX) with pure gold (cf. Rev. 21:12-21). It is not clear if Tobit implies that the presents from the nations will help the rebuilding. The anachronism of the text may be of interest. The implied date of the book is the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC when Israel and Samaria were destroyed but Jerusalem and the temple were still standing.<sup>1086</sup> Tobit probably was written between 225 and 175 BC,<sup>1087</sup> a date that precedes Antiochus's attempts to Hellenize Judea, and the ensuing conflict. This explains Tobit's positive view of the nations. The second temple had also been built by that time. The predictions for rebuilding the temple may suggest the author's attempt to validate his prophetic authority by using *vaticinium ex eventu*. This passage may be unique in containing the most positive view of the nations who come to Jerusalem without even a threat of retaliation for failing to do so.

However, the only passage combining the new heavens and new earth in the context of the nations performing a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the temple is found in Isa. 66. This oracle, containing most of the themes mentioned above, is more fitting to Rev. 21. The war/theophany is part of the context because the Lord is coming to execute fiery judgement with his chariots (Isa. 66:15-16). Instead of concentrating solely on Israel's salvation however, the Lord will gather all nations to see his glory (Isa. 66:18). This will be done because some of Israel will be sent as missionaries to the nations (Isa. 66:19, cf. Isa. 49:6; Tob. 13:3).<sup>1088</sup> The theme of light as a guide to the nations is not present (as in Isa. 60:3) but God's glory is. This is reminiscent of Rev. 21:23 where the glory of God illuminates the new Jerusalem. Next, the nations come, bringing with them the exiles as an offering to the Lord (Isa. 66:20), which evokes the theme

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<sup>1086</sup> Robert J. Littman, *Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 148.

<sup>1087</sup> Joseph Fitzmyer, *Tobit*, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 51-52.

<sup>1088</sup> Repeatedly in Isaiah, the return of the exiles to Israel is due to evangelistic activity performed by Israel, God's servant, not solely an event that occurs because of God's military intervention.

of temple worship. The temple culture is further highlighted when Isaiah claims that some of these gentiles will become worthy for service in the temple as “priests and Levites” (Isa. 66:21).<sup>1089</sup> In this new world, “all flesh” (an expression describing all humanity, cf. Ps. 65:2)<sup>1090</sup> will come regularly (from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another) to worship God. Whereas Zechariah’s regular worship was the annual Feast of Tabernacles (Zech. 14:16), Isaiah’s worship pilgrimage is monthly and weekly (Isa. 66:23). As noted before, all these pilgrimages occur in the context of the “new heavens and the new earth” that God will create (Isa. 66:22).

This brief overview examined several passages that probably shaped John’s description of the nations bringing their glory to God. In some (e.g., Zech. 14:12-16) war and judgement is instrumental in forcing the nations come to Jerusalem to worship;<sup>1091</sup> in others (e.g., Isa. 66:15-16) God’s judgement does not appear to be the main motivation behind the nations’ pilgrimage. Instead, conversion comes about either by the missionary activity of Israel to the nations or the nations’ realization that God favours Israel. In all cases, however, the nations’ conversion takes place before the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is the fruit of that conversion, and its purpose is to lead the nations to worship God. When the nations come to Israel, they pay some tribute to God, in most cases, involving the return of the exiles. Together with the exiles, the nations bring gifts and sacrifices to the temple and to Israel in general. These offerings appear to be the visible manifestations of the nations’ repentance and conversion.

Revelation’s narrative parallels the prophets’ predictions about the pilgrimage of the nations in many respects. First, a war between the nations and God is clearly in the background. In Rev. 19:11-21, the rider on the white horse fought and destroyed the nations just before the commencement of the millennium. At the end of the millennium, the nations once again attempted to attack God’s people under the influence of Satan but were destroyed by fire from heaven (Rev. 20:7-10). We noted that both passages clearly use military language. The language of divine judgement is also used in the scene before the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15). However, our exegesis of these stories found no hint that the nations repent or even survive these judgements. In fact, these judgements are so devastating and so universal that John had

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<sup>1089</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 426. See also Koester, *Revelation*, 822.

<sup>1090</sup> Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 428.

<sup>1091</sup> Merrill points out that the verb in Zech 14:16 translated as “worship” (הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה) is often used in non-cultic contexts to mean “to bow down or do obeisance.” Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 316.

to resurrect the nations in his narrative in order to re-deploy them (Rev. 20:5a, 8, 12-13). Clearly the war and the defeat of the nations are not occasions for their conversion.

Some scholars assume that the pilgrimage of the nations itself is symbolic of their conversion. Rissi suggests that “entry into Jerusalem means nothing less than being freed from the judgement of the lake of fire, the second death, and admission into God’s world of the new creation.”<sup>1092</sup> First, Rissi is mistaken in asserting that the lake of fire and the second death are images of temporary punishment. By contrast, their background in Egyptian mythology suggests that are images of eternal, irreversible death. In addition, the second resurrection is not the abolition of the reality of judgement, as Rissi supposes<sup>1093</sup> but, as we saw, the second resurrection precedes the judgement in order to facilitate the ultimate judgement of the wicked in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:5a, 9, 12-13).<sup>1094</sup> Third, Rissi fails to factor in the significance of the new creation. God has declared all things to be new (Rev. 21:5), which loses its force if old things such as the nations that defined most of the old world still exist in God’s new world. But the biggest problem is Rissi’s conceptual understanding of the pilgrimage. He supposes that it refers to a conversion experience or a one-time event that releases the individuals from the lake of fire and the bonds of the second death and allows them to enter the new Jerusalem. Likewise, for Vogelgesang the perpetually open gates of the city suggest the constant influx of nations into the new Jerusalem.<sup>1095</sup>

However, the pilgrimage of the nations in Revelation is not a one-time event signifying their repentance, but a recurring, constant event that portrays the nations worshipping God. In other words, pilgrimage does not depict the incorporation of the nations into God’s people or their conversion. Rather it depicts the nations that have previously repented and are God’s people coming constantly to worship him. Regular worship of God is the context of both Isa.

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<sup>1092</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 78. Osborne also understands the pilgrimage to signify the conversion of the nations, although he does not claim that the converts march from the lake of fire into the new Jerusalem, Osborne, *Revelation*, 763. In support of his argument, he cites Rev. 11:13; 14:7; 16:9. The first two passages are references to the nations repenting before the second coming. If that is so, then why do these nations need to repent again on the New Earth? Rev. 16:9 equates “giving glory to God” with repentance, but in other passages of Revelation ascribing glory to God is simply part of praise and worship (Rev. 1:6; 5:13; 7:12; 19:1).

<sup>1093</sup> Rissi, *The Future of the World*, 78.

<sup>1094</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 775; Osborne, *Revelation*, 708. Osborn makes the important observation that John does not even designate it as a “resurrection” perhaps because the New Testament normally reserves this term for believers.

<sup>1095</sup> Matheson summarizes Vogelgesang’s view in Mathewson, “The Nations in Revelation,” 124.

66:22-23 and Zech. 14:16.<sup>1096</sup> In Revelation, this recurrence is infinitely more intensified since it is constant, not annual as in Zechariah or monthly/weekly as in Isaiah.

We will proceed to demonstrate that in Revelation the pilgrimage of the nations refers to the regular worship of the nations who repented and were saved in the past by making the following points. First, John shows that conversion takes place before the millennium and the entrance of the nations into the new Jerusalem. Conversion is a prerequisite for the entrance; it does not signify it. Second, the pilgrimage as depicted by John is an image of worship. Finally, the pilgrimage of the nations is not recorded as a one-time event but rather as discipleship and recurrence.

### 9.3.1 Does pilgrimage signify conversion?

The pilgrimage of the nations through the open gates of the new Jerusalem is portrayed in both Rev. 21:25 and in Rev. 22:14. The second reference does not mention the nations but alludes to them in two ways. First, it speaks of people who enter through the gates into the city. The only reference to anyone going through the gates of the new Jerusalem is that of the nations in Rev. 21:25. Additionally, the passage mentions those who have access to the tree of life. Earlier in the chapter, the fruit and leaves of the tree of life are associated with “healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:2). The passage therefore directly alludes to both, and only, instances the nations are mentioned as being in the new Jerusalem.

According to Rev. 22:14, those who enter through the city gates are the blessed who have washed their robes (Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, Rev. 22:14).<sup>1097</sup> This is the seventh and last blessing pronounced in Revelation.<sup>1098</sup> The wording is similar to Rev. 7:14, in which those who came from the great tribulation are those who “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (ἔπλυναν τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου, Rev. 7:14).<sup>1099</sup> Washing in this context is a metaphor for the purging of sin because of the redemptive sacrifice of the Lamb, thus demonstrating that entering through the

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<sup>1096</sup> Although admittedly in Zech. 14:16 worshipping in the Temple is coerced, it is nevertheless regular. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 316.

<sup>1097</sup> There is an alternative reading for Rev. 22:14 but it has weak support. It reads “Μακάριοι οἱ ποιῶντες τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ”. As Koester points out, the thought of keeping God’s commandments is not foreign to Revelation (see Rev. 12:17; 14:12) although the awkward expression “to do” his commandments is not used in any of these texts. Both use the participle of the verb τηρέω. The variant probably arose because the two expressions sound remarkably similar in Greek. Koester, *Revelation*, 842. See also Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 767-68.

<sup>1098</sup> Roloff, *Revelation*, 251.

<sup>1099</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 789.

gates does not signify repentance. Repentance and the cleansing of sins takes place earlier and qualifies one to participate in the worship in the new Jerusalem.

Moreover, the passage brings up the theme of the washed robes. The noun robes (στολαί) appears four more times in two other passages in Revelation (Rev. 6:11; 7:9, 13, 14). In Rev. 6:11, each martyr is given a white robe. The passive is a sign of divine activity and so Aune renders the text as “Then God gave each of them a white robe and told them to rest a while longer.”<sup>1100</sup> The text thus differs from the remaining passages that mention robes. In Rev. 6:11, white robes are given to the martyred saints who do not seek them actively. The martyrs simply ask for justice but do not undertake any works to receive their reward. In this context, white robes connote honour and purity and are a gift to conquerors.<sup>1101</sup> In Rev. 7:9-14, the crowd that wore white robes had washed them (ἔπλυναν, aorist, 3<sup>rd</sup> person, plural, active) and made them white. The active form of the verb to wash does not indicate their independence from God since the means used for this washing is the blood of the Lamb. Thus here too the saints demonstrate their dependence on God. Most relevant for our study is that in both cases the white clothes result from the saints’ past actions and are tied to their activities in life. In Rev. 6:11, the vindication of the martyred saints arises because of their faithfulness, while events in world history still unfold and more of their brothers are dying. In Rev. 7:9-14, the victorious saints surrounding God’s throne (probably a proleptic image of the new world) have already washed their robes. The aorist tense of ἔπλυναν indicates that washing their clothes is an “action performed by the saints on earth during the tribulation.”<sup>1102</sup>

The background of the theme of the washed robes in Revelation suggests that the washing must have taken place during the course of history, not in the new world. This reinforces the idea that washing the robes in Rev. 22:14 is also something from the past. The present tense of the participle πλύνοντες does not denote the action taking place at the time of the narrative (i.e., in the new world) because it is a blessing addressed to the readers of the book and attempts to exhort them to holiness. Additionally, the present participle πλύνοντες suggests

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<sup>1100</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 410.

<sup>1101</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 400.

<sup>1102</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 436.

ongoing activity<sup>1103</sup>—repentance and spiritual revival characterize the present lives of those who will enter the new Jerusalem one day.<sup>1104</sup>

To sum up, although Rev. 22:14 does not mention the nations specifically, this passage is closely thematically related to all occurrences of the nations in the new Jerusalem, demonstrating that entering the new Jerusalem does not signify repentance and purification. Repentance and being worthy of salvation is indicated by the washing of one's robes. This action, judging by its occurrences in Revelation, takes place within the time frame of present history and not on the new earth. While the nations entering the new Jerusalem cannot be considered as an act of their repentance and their inclusion into God's family, it will be shown that it can be understood as an act of regular worship.

### 9.3.2 The nations' pilgrimage as an act of worship

It was noted earlier that Jewish images for the pilgrimage of the nations often revolved around the temple. At first sight, John seems to deny the existence of a temple in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22). However, he immediately qualifies his statement in the same verse by claiming that almighty God and the Lamb are its temple. John's apparently self-contradictory statements are not a rejection of the temple concept.<sup>1105</sup> On the contrary, John purposefully described the new Jerusalem with imagery directly related to the temple.

When John sees the new Jerusalem descending from heaven (Rev. 21:2) he hears a voice from the throne claiming that "God's tent (or tabernacle) will be with his people" (ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων Rev. 21:3). As Resseguie points out, what John hears in Revelation is interpreted by what he sees and vice versa.<sup>1106</sup> This exemplifies that what John sees (the descent of the new Jerusalem) is interpreted by the voice from the throne describing the tent of God with his people. The outward reality of what John sees in this passage is the new Jerusalem, which city is in fact, among other things, the tent or tabernacle of God.<sup>1107</sup> The word for tent is

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<sup>1103</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 393.

<sup>1104</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 789.

<sup>1105</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 821.

<sup>1106</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 52.

<sup>1107</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1046.

σκηνή. The word is closely related to *Shekinah* which was used “to denote the presence and glory of God in the temple.”<sup>1108</sup>

The shape of the new Jerusalem suggests that it is not an ordinary city but one with cultic significance. The angels that measured the city found it to be 12,000 stadia long in each direction (Rev. 21:16), including its height.<sup>1109</sup> This makes the city either the shape of a cube or a pyramid.<sup>1110</sup> If John envisioned the city as having the shape of pyramid, then the structure could reflect the Babylonian ziggurats, temples that supposedly reached the heavens. Whereas those temples were humanity’s sinful attempts to reach the heavens (Gen. 11:4), the new Jerusalem itself came down from heaven. The various contrasts that John makes between Jerusalem and Babylon may also suggest that this is another of John’s combative rhetorical strategies against Babylon.<sup>1111</sup> The problem with this is that the story of Genesis does not depict the tower of Babel as pyramidal, so we cannot assume that John thought of it as such.

Another, greater probability is that John envisioned the new Jerusalem as a cube. This model probably invoked the shape of the second Jewish temple that was intended to be 60 cubits high and wide according to Ezra 6:2-3. While the length was missing from these measurements, the length of the first temple was 60 cubits (1 Kgs 6:2). It is probable then that the second temple was a cube measuring 60 cubits in every direction.<sup>1112</sup> Both options for the shape of the city (pyramid or cube) suggest that its dimensions involve some sort of cultic aspect. However, it is more likely in this case that John shaped the new Jerusalem by using his own special traditions. Words such as σκηνή in Rev. 21:3 are too strong a link to the ancient Jewish

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<sup>1108</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 371. See also Ford, *Revelation*, 362. Mounce observes that although the two words belong to “unrelated linguistic families”, the consonants of both are the same. The term *Shekinah* does not appear in the Bible, only in the later Rabbinic literature. Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 148. McNamara also points out that the phrase “ναὸν τῆς σῆς σκηνώσεως” appears in 2 Macc. 14:35 and here the abstract noun σκηνώσις “closely corresponds in meaning and form to *Shekinah*.” 2 Macc. is dated before the Roman conquest of 63 BC. McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited*, 148.

<sup>1109</sup> Assuming that each stadium was about 190 metres, long it would make each dimension of the city about 2300 km. long.

<sup>1110</sup> Most recent scholars who consider the pyramid shape for the new Jerusalem end up rejecting it. See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 380; Osborne, *Revelation*, 753. Beale is an exception, apparently taking a more sympathetic approach to the pyramid hypothesis. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1075.

<sup>1111</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1075.

<sup>1112</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1161. See also Koester, *Revelation and the End*, 196-97; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 112; Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 113; Collins, *Apocalypse*, 148.



tabernacle to be overlooked.<sup>1113</sup> This means that John portrayed the city itself in the shape of the Jewish temple.

Apart from its shape, the materials of the new Jerusalem suggest several cultic aspects of the temple. The foundational stones of the walls of the city, for instance, are made of precious stones (Rev. 21:14, 19-20) seemingly corresponding to the twelve stones on the breastplate of the high priest.<sup>1114</sup> The main material of the city is gold (Rev. 21:18) and the wall is made of jasper. According to 1 Kgs. 6:20-22, Solomon had lined the whole interior of the sanctuary with gold.<sup>1115</sup> Thus both the precious stones and the material of the city evoke traditional images of the temple.

Moreover, the exclusion from the city of anything unclean (πᾶν κοινόν) in Rev. 21:27 suggests that the city is described as a temple. The term κοινός is closely related to ritual impurity since in this context it refers to profane things.<sup>1116</sup> In the HB, profane and unclean things were “antithetical to the sanctity of the temple or to the worship of God.”<sup>1117</sup> As God is holy, his people are also called on to be holy (Lev. 11:44-45). The fact that nothing unclean can enter the city does not suggest the existence of evil outside the city gates as much as it affirms the holiness of the temple city itself.

In addition, it may be possible that John wanted to associate the new Jerusalem’s landing site with mount Zion upon which the temple was built. Several prophecies envisioned that at the eschaton the mountain of the Lord would be raised above all other mountains and from there God would reign over the nations. Some of these prophecies also envisioned the nations coming to God’s mountain to worship him (Ps. 48:1-3; Isa. 2:2-5; 24:23; Joel 3:17; Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 14:3-11; 1 En. 25:3).<sup>1118</sup> John was shown the coming of the new Jerusalem when he was transported by the spirit to a high mountain (Rev. 21:10). Although the text is not explicit, it

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<sup>1113</sup> Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200.

<sup>1114</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 342. The correspondence of the names of the precious stones is not exact with Exod. 28:17-20; 39:8-14. Eight stones appear in both accounts and the remainder appear to be semantic equivalent of those in Exodus. Caird, *The Revelation*, 274-75. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1080.

<sup>1115</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1079.

<sup>1116</sup> F. Hauck, “κοινός,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 3:797. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1174. 1 Macc. 1:47 uses the word to describe Antiochus’s ritually unclean sacrifices “οἰκοδομῆσαι βωμοὺς καὶ τεμένη καὶ εἰδώλια καὶ θύειν ὕεια καὶ κτήνη κοινὰ” (...[To] build altars and sacred precincts and idols and sacrifice pigs and common beasts).

<sup>1117</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 765.

<sup>1118</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 812.

may suggest that the high mountain of God is where the new Jerusalem landed.<sup>1119</sup> Once again, the notion of a “mountain great and high” (ὄρος μέγα καὶ ὑψηλόν, Rev. 21:10) may imply that the new Jerusalem is a temple city situated on God’s holy and great mountain.

Last, the association of the garden of Eden with the new Jerusalem also has cultic connotations. In the new Jerusalem, the river of life flows from God’s throne, an allusion to Ezek. 47:1-12 and the river that flowed from the temple threshold.<sup>1120</sup> The image also evokes the garden of Eden from where a river flowed (ἐξ Εδέμ, Gen. 2:10) to water the garden. In Rev. 22:1, the river flows from God’s throne (ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου). The tree of life in Rev. 22:2 also alludes to the garden of Eden. The new Jerusalem incorporates features particular to the garden of Eden.<sup>1121</sup> In Jubilees, the garden of Eden was thought of as God’s temple, Jub. 4:26 claiming that “the Lord has four (sacred) places upon the earth: the garden of Eden and the mountain of the East and this mountain which you are upon today, Mount Sinai, and Mount Zion, which will be sanctified in the new creation for the sanctification of the earth.”<sup>1122</sup> A similar notion also appears in the second tour of Enoch in the *Book of Watchers*. In 1 En. 24-25, the tree of life will be “transplanted in the Temple in the eschatological future.”<sup>1123</sup> The association between the new Jerusalem and images alluding to the garden of Eden further highlights the cultic image of the city.

The new Jerusalem being depicted as a temple city makes it logical for the nations to enter the city to offer their worship. The nations and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honour to her (τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν, Rev. 21:26). In the passages we considered earlier, the pilgrimage of the nations were usually accompanied by the return of exiles from captivity. Clearly John is not interested in this,<sup>1124</sup> as the believers have already returned from the exile of Babylon (Rev. 18:4). He does not record sacrifices for the temple, or monetary wealth from the nations to flow into Jerusalem either.<sup>1125</sup> The phrase “glory and honour” is found four times

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<sup>1119</sup> So Bauckham, *The Theology*, 132-33. Reddish, *Revelation*, 406.

<sup>1120</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 386.

<sup>1121</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 769.

<sup>1122</sup> O. S. Wintermute, “Jubilees,” in *OTP*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, vol. 2, 2 vols. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 35-142. (Trans. Wintermute.)

<sup>1123</sup> Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 24. See also Martha Himmelfarb, *The Apocalypse: A Brief History* (Chichester ; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 24.

<sup>1124</sup> Unlike Isa. 49:17-18; 60:4; 66:20.

<sup>1125</sup> Unlike Isa. 60:5, 7, 11, 13, where the wealth of nations and sacrifices were expected to flood Jerusalem.

in Revelation.<sup>1126</sup> These nouns also come up again in the sevenfold list of Rev. 7:12 together with blessing, wisdom, thanksgiving, power and strength. Praise and worship are undoubtedly the background of all these occurrences.<sup>1127</sup>

The word δόξα can refer to wealth and riches.<sup>1128</sup> Nonetheless, the phrase glory and honour in Revelation “refers without exception to praise ... [directed to] God and the Lamb.”<sup>1129</sup> Indeed, the riches of the new Jerusalem are so great and mythical that the wealth of the nations is unnecessary. It seems obvious that John substituted the notion “of military victory and plunder” for the image of worship.<sup>1130</sup>

Another indication that John’s imagery of voluntary worship and praise comes from the words that John chose to describe the pilgrimage. The nations of Revelation do not simply come to God’s light (as do the nations of Isa. 60, for example) but are said to walk (περιπατήσουσιν) by the city’s light.<sup>1131</sup> Besides the notion of spatial traveling from place to place, περιπατέω in a metaphorical sense is used to denote a “way of living”.<sup>1132</sup> It is found in the New Testament only in 2 Cor. 5:7 with the preposition διὰ, where it refers to living by faith (διὰ πίστεως γὰρ περιπατοῦμεν).<sup>1133</sup>

The word περιπατήσουσιν sharply contrasts the pilgrimage of the nations to the new Jerusalem and the attack of the nations on the beloved city in Rev. 20:9. In a previous chapter we noted that John used ἀνέβησαν and ἐκύκλευσαν. It was shown that ἀνέβησαν was associated with the recent resurrection of the nations from Hades but also that it signified an aggressive military stance.<sup>1134</sup> The word ἐκύκλευσαν clearly refers to a military tactical attack. However, it is not simply the words that are contrasted between these two actions. The tenses also provide another contrast. In Rev. 20:9, the verbs ἀνέβησαν and ἐκύκλευσαν are in the aorist, which

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<sup>1126</sup> In Rev. 4:9, 11 it appears as “glory and honour” and in Rev. 5:12, 13 appears in reverse order as “honour and glory.”

<sup>1127</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 316. Contra J. Schneider, “τιμή,” in *TDNT* (Eerdmans, 1976), 8:169-180. Schneider suggests that τιμή here refers to literal earthly goods.

<sup>1128</sup> See, for instance, Matt. 4:8 in which the word refers specifically to the wealth of the kingdoms of the world, (τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν).

<sup>1129</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1095.

<sup>1130</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 763.

<sup>1131</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1171.

<sup>1132</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1171.

<sup>1133</sup> Joseph Thayer, “περιπατέω,” in *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York, NY: American Book Company, 1889), 504.

<sup>1134</sup> See chapter 7.3.

defines one specific action, not a continuous practice. The nations rose up only once against Jerusalem and were defeated and destroyed. However, the verbs περιπατήσουσιν and οἴσουσιν are in the indicative future and φέρουσιν is in the indicative present. Both the future and the present tense verbs can be understood as describing a continuous and repetitive event.<sup>1135</sup> This notion fits the Isa. 66 background perfectly, where the nations come regularly to the temple (every new moon and every Sabbath) to worship God. Indeed, John's point is that the nations entering the new Jerusalem is not a one-off act of repentance but a regular act of worship. Whereas in the old creation the nations fought against God, in the new creation the nations enter God's massive temple city offering their worship.

The notion that the nations come and worship God should not be surprising, because John had already predicted this outcome in Rev. 15:3-4. Right after John sees the seven angels that will pour the last seven plagues of God, he sees a prophetic image of those who will triumph against the beast singing the song of Moses. Among other praises, the song stipulates that "all nations will come and worship before you" (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἡξουσιν καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου, Rev. 15:4). This prophecy is fulfilled when the nations bring their glory and honour to God.<sup>1136</sup>

A by-product of the nations bringing their worship into the new Jerusalem is that in this particular passage the city cannot possibly signify the people of God, but God's presence or temple. As we noted at the beginning, the new Jerusalem symbolizes several things, including the people of God, but John would never describe God's people as the recipients of the worship of the nations. Worship in Revelation is only due to God and the Lamb. Not even angelic beings are entitled to it (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:9).<sup>1137</sup> Since the nations specifically bring their glory and honour to her (εἰς αὐτήν, Rev. 21:24, 26) the new Jerusalem in this passage ought to signify God's presence who is her temple (Rev. 21:22) and God who brightens her with his glory (Rev. 21:23).<sup>1138</sup> This is another reason why the image of the nations entering the new Jerusalem cannot refer to their incorporation into the rest of God's people. This would imply that the

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<sup>1135</sup> A. B. Μουμπτάκης, *Συντακτικό Της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής*. (Athens: ΟΕΔΒ, 2003), 72, 74. See also Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 168. Buist specifically cites the φέρουσιν of Rev. 21:14 as an example.

<sup>1136</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 636. See also Rowland, *Revelation*, 672.

<sup>1137</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 739.

<sup>1138</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology*, 140-43.

worship of the nations (described in terms of their glory and honour, Rev. 21:26) is given to humans.

## 9.4 The tree of life

The theme of unhindered access to God, that was previously communicated by the open gates of the city, is also highlighted by the tree of life. According to John, the tree of life produces twelve fruits, one for each month (Rev. 22:2). In addition, its leaves are “for the healing of the nations” (εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν, Rev. 22:2). John’s image of the tree of life in Revelation stems from the conflation of Ezekiel’s image of the trees growing on the banks of the river flowing from the temple in Ezek. 47:1-12 and the story of the tree of life from the garden of Eden in Genesis chs. 2-3.<sup>1139</sup> Central to all three accounts is the existence of a river.<sup>1140</sup> In Gen. 2:10, a river that waters the garden runs from Eden and separates itself into four. In Ezek. 47:1, water from the threshold of the temple flows gradually towards the east. In Rev. 22:1, a river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

In Ezekiel, many trees are growing on each side of the river (Ezek. 47:12). The image is similar to that of Revelation where the tree of life also grows on both banks of the river (Rev. 22:2). Most interpreters understand that since ξύλον in Rev. 22:2 is a collective term indicating many trees, both Ezekiel and Revelation envision trees growing on the bank of the river.<sup>1141</sup> The trees in Ezek. are not specifically called a tree or trees of life, but they bear fruit every month because of the water that flows from the sanctuary (cf. Rev. 22:2) and their leaves are

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<sup>1139</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 387.

<sup>1140</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1103.

<sup>1141</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 299; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 765; Roloff, *Revelation*, 246; Farrer, *The Revelation*, 222; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1177. An alternative is that the roots and branches of one tree located on the opposite banks of the river merge into one trunk to form a single tree of life. The imagery may be suggestive of “sacred trees” growing above springs with healing properties; a common image in the Graeco-Roman world. Koester, *Revelation*, 834. For the possibility of one tree of life, see Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 604; Koester, *Revelation*, 823. Beale seems content with both options, which is why he writes of “tree(s) of life.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1104. One tree of life suggests closer affinity with the Genesis tree. This is supported by the paradisiacal setting of Rev. 22:2. Koester, *Revelation*, 823. Multiple trees on each side of the river, however, implies greater influence from Ezek. 47. The emphasis on the river-banks seems to follow the language of Ezek. 47:12 and probably suggests multiple trees. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 287.

for healing (cf. Rev. 22:2).<sup>1142</sup> But this function of the leaves creates more questions. Why is healing required in a world where there is no death or pain (Rev. 21:4)?<sup>1143</sup>

Caird understands the function of the tree of life in the context of universalism. He expects “the nations, still bearing the wounds of those battles” fought against the Lamb and now “beaten down, smashed by the iron bar of his inexorable love”, to enter the city and find their cure from the leaves of the trees of life.<sup>1144</sup> The problem with Caird’s interpretation as we noted in previous chapters is that the Lamb did not wound his enemies but killed them. Both Rev. 19:11-21 and Rev. 20:7-10 record battles with no survivors. In Rev. 19, the aftermath of the battle is the gruesome dinner of the scavenging birds (Rev. 19:17-18) and the fire from heaven in Rev. 20:9 devoured all of God’s enemies. These images do not leave open the possibility of injured survivors limping into the new Jerusalem seeking treatment, nor point to the Lamb’s “inexorable” love. Indeed, the image of the nations bringing their glory and honour to God does not indicate that they are the defeated, injured survivors of a battle in need healing either. On the contrary, the nations are portrayed as God’s peoples worshipping him in his temple city.

Hemer provides a different interpretation for the tree of life. His starting-point is the word ξύλον in Rev. 22:2. Hemer admits that in the LXX this refers to trees, but he observes that in the New Testament and Revelation the usual word for tree is δένδρον (see Rev. 7:1, 3; 8:7; 9:4).<sup>1145</sup> He also points out that in the New Testament ξύλον refers to wood or timber and especially to the cross of Christ.<sup>1146</sup> Hemer concludes that the tree of life represents the cross. He supports this interpretation on the basis that the first occurrence of the tree of life is found in the letter to the church in Ephesus. According to Hemer, the temple of Artemis in Ephesus was originally a tree shrine.<sup>1147</sup> He argues that this association suggested to the pagan readers of Asia Minor that the “power of pagan temples” will be finally abolished in the new Jerusalem

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<sup>1142</sup> The LXX reading of Ezek. 47:12 is different, not mentioning the leaves. It reads: “their ascent is for health” (ἀνάβασις αὐτῶν εἰς υἰότητα). Clearly John was influenced by the Hebrew text here.

<sup>1143</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 387; Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 618 (April 1998): 220; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1108.

<sup>1144</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 280.

<sup>1145</sup> Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, vol. 11, JSNT (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 42-43.

<sup>1146</sup> Hemer, *The Letters*, 43. That is, in all occurrences excluding those in Revelation referring to the tree of life, and the “proverbial expression of Luke 23:31” where again Herms understands it to mean simply wood.

<sup>1147</sup> Hemer, *The Letters*, 44-46.

just as for the Jewish readers the sacrificial system of the earthly city was superseded by the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>1148</sup>

Hemer's interpretation has some problems. First, although ξύλον commonly refers to wood or timber (outside the LXX), in Revelation the tree of life is specifically portrayed as a living tree planted by the river of life, producing fruit and with leaves (Rev. 22:2). Wood and timber cannot accurately describe this image of the tree of life. Second, as Wong notes, Revelation does not evince any particular interest in the cross of Christ as an image of his redemptive work. The emphasis is nearly always on the imagery of Christ as the Lamb.<sup>1149</sup>

Wong focuses on yet another attribute of the tree of life, namely, that of granting immortality. He explains that in both Gen. 3:22 and other later Jewish works (e.g., Sirach 19:19; T. Lev. 18:9-12; 1 En. 24:3-25:5; 4 Ezra 2:1-13; 8:50-52), the main purpose of the tree of life is to give eternal life to God's people.<sup>1150</sup> Wong also points out that the "healing leaves need not imply sickness", because the tree existed in "Eden before sin and sickness (Gen. 2:9; 3:22)."<sup>1151</sup> Furthermore, the word *θεραπεία* not only means healing but also service and care. In fact, service and attendance is the primary meaning of the word according to Liddell and Scott.<sup>1152</sup> *θεράπων* and *θεράπεινα* are common terms for servant and attendant in the LXX.<sup>1153</sup> The word is often associated with service in the context of worship. In Joel 1:14 and 2:15, the order to "proclaim a service" is rendered as *κηρύξατε θεραπείαν*. Tobit 1:7 claims that he gave his tithe to the sons of Levi who serve in Jerusalem (*τὴν δεκάτην ἐδίδουν τοῖς υἱοῖς Λευι τοῖς θεραπεύουσιν ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ*). Jdt. 11:17 also uses the word in the worship context when she says that "your servant is God fearing and serves God night and day" (*ἡ δούλη σου θεοσεβής ἐστιν καὶ θεραπεύουσα νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας τὸν θεόν*). The phrase night and day is often associated with temple service.<sup>1154</sup> Last, the word is associated with idol worship in the Ep. Jer. 1:25, 38. Those who serve them (*οἱ θεραπεύοντες αὐτά*, Ep. Jer. 1:25) are ashamed.

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<sup>1148</sup> Hemer, *The Letters*, 44.

<sup>1149</sup> Wong, "The Tree of Life," 216.

<sup>1150</sup> Wong, "The Tree of Life," 218.

<sup>1151</sup> Wong, "The Tree of Life," 220.

<sup>1152</sup> LSJ, s.v. "*θεραπεία*."

<sup>1153</sup> See, for example, Exod. 33:11 for Joshua as Moses' servant; or Num. 12:7, Josh. 1:2 for Moses as God's servant; or Gen. 45:16 for Pharaoh's attendants.

<sup>1154</sup> Ioannis Giantzaklidis, "The Heavenly Temple in the Book of Watchers," in *Earthly Shadows, Heavenly Realities: Temple/Sanctuary Cosmology in Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Jewish Literature* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2017), 309. See, for example, Rev. 7:15.

Such usage of the word *θεραπεία* is in agreement with that in classical Greek where the word was also used to describe the service of priests to the gods. For instance, Herodotus, describing the customs of Egyptian priests, claims that every other day they shave their whole bodies to prevent lice or any other defilement which may infest them while “serving the gods” (*θεραπεύουσι τοὺς θεοὺς*, Hdt. 2:37). Even in the NT where the word overwhelming means healing and particularly is used in connection with the miracles of Jesus, the word is also used in the context of worship. Paul, talking about God to the Athenians on Mars Hill, claims that God is not to be served by human hands (*οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται*, Acts 17:25).

In addition, the Genesis account of the tree of life contains the question of access to that tree. At first, the tree of life was freely available to Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:9).<sup>1155</sup> However, access to that tree was denied after the fall. Since God reasoned that people should not be allowed to take from the tree of life and live forever (Gen. 3:22),<sup>1156</sup> he placed protective cherubim there with a flaming sword to guard and prohibit access to the tree. In Rev. 22:2, access to the tree of life is restored.<sup>1157</sup> One by one the obstacles imposed because of sin are being removed. The nations have access to the tree of life, and “nothing accursed is any longer” (*πᾶν κατάθεμα οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι*, Rev. 22:3). This probably refers to the removal of the curse itself that was imposed in the garden of Eden.<sup>1158</sup> Last, God’s servants are able to see his face. This is a “clear reversal of earlier restrictions against” encounters with divinity.<sup>1159</sup> In Genesis, Adam hid from God’s face after he sinned (*ἀπὸ προσώπου κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ*, Gen. 3:8). On the new earth, the paradisaical conditions will be restored to the time before the sin of Adam, and believers will be able to see God’s face. Once again, the notion of seeing God’s face also carries cultic connotations since it is used in the context of “worshipping God in the temple (Ps. 42:2).”<sup>1160</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza understands this image as picturing God’s servants as high priests who have God’s name engraved on their foreheads (Rev. 22:4 cf. Exod. 28:36). In contrast to the high

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<sup>1155</sup> Wong, “The Tree of Life,” 219.

<sup>1156</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1107.

<sup>1157</sup> Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 290.

<sup>1158</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 824; Osborne, *Revelation*, 773; Lee, *The New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation*, 291; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 316. Wall based on Frank A Spina, “The ‘Ground’ for Cain’s Rejection (Gen 4): ’ādāmāh in the Context of Gen 1-11,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104, no. 3 (1992): 319-32, suggests that the curse that was broken was not God’s curse against Adam but the amplified curse against Cain (Gen. 4:11-14). Wall, *Revelation*, 260. Both stories are part of the creation story and John’s text does allow for the removal of *all* curses (*πᾶν κατάθεμα*).

<sup>1159</sup> Wall, *Revelation*, 260.

<sup>1160</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1179.



priest who only entered the most holy place once a year on the day of atonement, these “eschatological high priests” will be in God’s presence forever.<sup>1161</sup> The topic of access to the tree of life is also directly related to that of service and worship.

The remaining question has to do with the function of the leaves of the tree of life. The leaves on a tree are an excellent indicator of its condition. A tree planted by streams of water yields much fruit and its leaves are vigorous and do not wither (Ps. 1:3). This seems to be the case in Ezek. 47:12 where the dominant motif is not the trees but the river that nourishes and purifies them (Ezek. 47:12). Even the dead sea and its waters become fresh and full of fish (Ezek. 47:9).<sup>1162</sup> The trees in Ezekiel are not designated as tree(s) of life. The river that flows from God’s throne forms the basis for life. In contrast, the river of “bright living water” (ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν)<sup>1163</sup> in Rev. 22:1 does not appear to figure prominently in the passage. Elsewhere in Rev. 7:17, the redeemed are led to the springs of living waters and in Rev. 21:6 God promises to give the thirsty living water from the spring. The promise is reiterated again in Rev. 22:17. In Rev. 22:1, nobody drinks from the living waters. The benefit of the river may be inferred as the watering source of the tree of life.

A major diversion from Ezekiel’s symbolism is John’s comprehending the nations as the beneficiaries of the tree of life. In Ezekiel, it is ethnic “Israel that is healed (in keeping with the particularism of Ezekiel), while here it is ‘the nations’”.<sup>1164</sup> Moyise calls it “a conscious expanding of Ezekiel’s horizons.”<sup>1165</sup> Bauckham observes that whereas Ezekiel’s trees bear fruit every month, in Revelation “John has taken this to mean” that the tree of life bears “twelve kinds of fruit.”<sup>1166</sup> John therefore combines an allusion to Israel by using the number twelve while also referring to the nations.<sup>1167</sup> This observation suggests that the nations are now designated as peoples of God in the new world. In Ezekiel, Israel, which was God’s nation, was the recipient of the healing leaves; in Revelation, the nations are associated with the number twelve and are to receive the benefit of these leaves.

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<sup>1161</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 112-13.

<sup>1162</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Ezekiel, Daniel*, 9:438-39.

<sup>1163</sup> The genitive appears to be adjectival (living waters) and not appositional (waters, which are life). See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1103-4.

<sup>1164</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 772; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1178; Beale, *John’s Use*, 110; Koester, *Revelation*, 835.

<sup>1165</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 81.

<sup>1166</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 316.

<sup>1167</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 316.

It is difficult to ascertain what the meaning of this healing is. Aune thinks that the allusion is simply mechanical since the healing of the nations cannot be “construed as their conversion.”<sup>1168</sup> Osborne and Beale seem to agree that this is not a reference to the nations’ eschatological conversion but suppose it is a reference to the past “conversion of the nations”,<sup>1169</sup> or the “redemption accomplished by Christ, which will be consummated at his final Parousia.”<sup>1170</sup> Both suggest that the healing symbolizes the nation’s conversion in the course of history.<sup>1171</sup> Therein lies a difficulty with these assertions. According to John, the benefit of the tree of life seems to apply in the new world. Stefanovic appears to notice this problem and proposes a symbolic healing function for the tree which is relevant in the new restored earth, claiming that the healing “refers figuratively to the removal of all national and linguistic barriers and separation.”<sup>1172</sup> All wounds inflicted for “racial, ethnic, tribal or linguistic” reasons and divided humanity will be healed.<sup>1173</sup> Stefanovic’s hypothesis focuses on the future function of the tree of life, a notion that appears to concur with John’s text.<sup>1174</sup> He also suggests a more particular function for the healing that is relevant to its recipients (i.e., the nations) and is less vague than the notion of “spiritual care”<sup>1175</sup> or spiritual healing in the new world. The removal of ethnic barriers need not be understood simply in a social context but also in the context of worship. The nations, whose worship was restricted to the outer courts of the Jerusalem temple, now are allowed to offer their service/worship (θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν as a subjective genitive) in the innermost courts,<sup>1176</sup> as well as experiencing the healing (θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν as an objective genitive) deriving from their full participation in God’s worship.<sup>1177</sup>

The tree of life motif reinforced some of our past conclusions. First, the worship context of John is further elaborated, and is included in the tree of life imagery. Second, free access to God is also highlighted. In Rev. 21:25, the nations’ free access to worship was communicated

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<sup>1168</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1178.

<sup>1169</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 772.

<sup>1170</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1108.

<sup>1171</sup> Osborne allows for some “spiritual healing” to take place in the new Jerusalem. He describes this healing in rather vague terms: “all will be in right relationship to God”. Osborne, *Revelation*, 772.

<sup>1172</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 604.

<sup>1173</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 605.

<sup>1174</sup> My understanding of Stefanovic’s view is not that the nations still carry these wounds on the new earth and need to eat from the leaves of the tree of life for the wounds to be healed. Rather, the healing leaves symbolize the harmony that will abound in God’s new world.

<sup>1175</sup> Wong, “The Tree of Life,” 220-21.

<sup>1176</sup> Wong, “The Tree of Life,” 220-21. Wong does not analyse the grammar however.

<sup>1177</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 772.

through the perpetually open gates of the new Jerusalem. In Rev. 22:2, access to the tree of life, previously restricted by angels in Gen. 3:24, is now given to the nations freely. These two images do not simply highlight free access to worship but specify the nations, who were typically confined to the outer parts of the Jerusalem temple, as the beneficiaries of that access. What in Ezekiel was the reward of the covenant people (particularism) is extended to the nations in Revelation. In doing so, John fully integrates the nations as God's people. The new Jerusalem is indeed an "open inclusive place of citizenship and well-being for all."<sup>1178</sup> This inclusivity, however, is not indiscriminate universalism. The context of Revelation 19-20 as discussed in the previous chapters as well as the caveats in Rev. 21:8; 27; 22:15 make it clear that "unrepentant sinners have no place in the new Jerusalem."<sup>1179</sup>

So far, it has been established that in the new creation nothing old and impure has survived. It has also been shown that the nations entering the new Jerusalem is not an image of conversion but rather of their uninhibited worship in God's temple city of those already saved. The time of conversion and forgiveness had been in the past, during the old world, when the believers had to wash their robes. The tree of life imagery reinforces these conclusions. The cultic context of the new Jerusalem is highlighted again with the paradisaical context. Free access to God is restored. What was specifically forbidden in Genesis is now unreservedly granted. Amazingly enough, the nations are once again the explicit beneficiaries.

The dramatic entrance of the nations into the new Jerusalem and the paradox of the nations bringing their worship to God has overshadowed the most important thing missing in the description of the new Jerusalem: the description of God's people. Most of the discussion has involved the question of the nations entering the new Jerusalem, and neglected the question of where God's people are. Some simply assume that the new Jerusalem is the symbol of the church. This is true of Rev. 21:11-21 where measuring the new Jerusalem results in numbers that are twelve (Rev. 21:12, 21) or multiples of twelve (twelve thousand Rev. 21:16; hundred and forty-four Rev. 21:17). However, as noted earlier it is impossible to see the new Jerusalem as a symbol of the church in Rev. 21:24-27 because that would imply that the nations offer their worship to the church. It will be argued next that in God's new world the nations are the new image of God's people in the new earth, and certainly do not represent the old nations.

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<sup>1178</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 114.

<sup>1179</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 313.

## 9.5 God's people in the new world

Everything is new in God's new world (Rev. 21:5), including the way God refers to his people. The voice from the throne not only declared that the tent of God will be with humanity but also that they will be his peoples (λαοὶ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται, Rev. 21:3). The message of this voice is so common in the HB that ascertaining the particular text John alludes to is difficult. Among the possible candidates are Lev. 26:12; Jer. 24:7; 38:1; 38:33 (LXX references); Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; 37:27; Zech. 8:8. These all employ the formula: "I will be their God and they will be my people" but only Ezek. 37:27 and Zech. 8:8 also include the theme of God encamping with his people, making these two better candidates to be John's source. Revelation, however, is different in a specific way from all the above examples. Whereas all the HB instances speak of God's people as λαός, Revelation describes God's people as λαοί.

There is textual evidence for two different readings in Rev. 21:3. Some sixteen manuscripts, among them  $\kappa$ , A, 046, read λαοί. Another group of manuscripts backed by P, 051, 1006, 1611, 1841, 1854, 2062, however, read λαός. Both Nestle Aland and Aune prefer the first set that read λαοί.<sup>1180</sup> Metzger suggests two options. The first is that the copyist altered the original λαός to make it conform with the pronoun αὐτοὶ immediately preceding it.<sup>1181</sup> This option is unconvincing, since there is no grammatical reason for such a change. The noun λαός refers to a multitude and therefore a plural pronoun makes perfect sense as its antecedent. In fact, Ezek. 37:27 contains the plural pronoun αὐτοί together with the singular noun λαός (Ezek. 37:27 καὶ αὐτοί μου ἔσονται λαός).<sup>1182</sup> Since Metzger seems to understand there is no actual grammatical reason for such a change, he speculates that a pedantic copyist could be responsible.<sup>1183</sup>

Metzger's other option is preferable. A scribe changed the original λαοί to λαός in order to align the passage with its HB background.<sup>1184</sup> This second option is also supported by Swete, who believes that John used λαοί intentionally to express his new theological agenda.<sup>1185</sup> This position claims that John envisions a different new world from the HB prophets, John's new

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<sup>1180</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1110.

<sup>1181</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 765.

<sup>1182</sup> The same is true for Jer. 24:7; 38:1, 33; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 37:23; Zech. 8:8. In all these cases, plural pronouns are the antecedent of the singular λαός.

<sup>1183</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 765.

<sup>1184</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 765.

<sup>1185</sup> Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 278.

world comprises many λαοί (peoples) not simply one λαός (people).<sup>1186</sup> This reading is more difficult (as it contradicts all the HB source passages, and the frequent New Testament designation of the church as God’s λαός, as in Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10), which makes it a better candidate for John’s original reading.<sup>1187</sup> Furthermore, according to Metzger the λαοί has slightly superior manuscript attestation.<sup>1188</sup> It thus seems that John intended at the inception of his description of the new world to refer to God’s people as “peoples” (λαοί).<sup>1189</sup>

The term λαοί is the first explicit ethnic designation of God’s people in the new world. We will see that this designation functions as a programmatic statement. From the very beginning, John wanted his readers to understand the radical new reality of the new world. The word λαός is synonymous with ἔθνος both of which translate the Hebrew words אֲמ (‘am) and גּוֹי (goy) respectively. Although both denote human groups, the former is usually used in the singular to refer to God’s people and the latter in the plural to refer to the gentiles.<sup>1190</sup> λαός, therefore, has stronger positive religious implications.

The hypothesis that John uses the designation “nations” to refer to all the believers on the new earth helps us understand the rationale behind Rev. 22:14. We saw that the passage speaks of the faithful believers in the same terms that John speaks of believers elsewhere in Revelation—as those who wear white or have washed their robes (see Rev. 6:11; 7:13-14). The reward of these believers is identical to the reward of the nations (Rev. 22:14). They enter into the city through the gates and have access to the tree of life (Rev. 21:24-26; 22:2). It is not unreasonable therefore to identify the two categories (believing nations and believers) in the context of the new world.

John once again makes this point antithetically in Rev. 22:19. While pronouncing curses to those who add or subtract from his prophecy, he warns that those who remove from the words of his revelation, God will punish in two ways. First, he will remove their share in the tree of life and second, he will remove them from the holy city. The more natural punishment for removing parts of the words of John’s prophecy would have been removal from the book of life

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<sup>1186</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 402.

<sup>1187</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1110; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 252.

<sup>1188</sup> Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 765. See also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1048; Boring, *Revelation*, 221.

<sup>1189</sup> Gundry also agrees with this conclusion, claiming that “(λαοί) in 21:3, apparently ... emphasize[s] the internationality of the church, made up as it is of the redeemed from the pagan nations as well as from Israel.” Gundry, “The New Jerusalem,” 257.

<sup>1190</sup> G. Bertram, “ἔθνος,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Eerdmans, 1976), 2:364-369.

(as in Rev. 3:5).<sup>1191</sup> But once more John contrasts the punishment of those who take his prophecies lightly with the rewards of the nations. The conclusion is that those who hear the prophecy are invited to pay serious attention to the words of the book in order not to be excluded from a reward that was decided for the nations earlier. This suggests that John's apocalyptic community, which was the audience of Revelation, are candidates to comprise the future nations in the new world of God.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the first mention of where the tree of life is. In Rev. 2:7, Christ promises the victors in the Ephesian church that they will eat from the tree of life. As with Christ's other promises made to the churches, its fulfilment is eschatological and takes place in God's restored world.<sup>1192</sup> In the vision of the new Jerusalem, the only group of people for whom access to the tree of life is affirmed is the nations. This affinity supports the conclusion that the nations here are identical with John's audience, which he is trying to nurture and encourage through his prophecies.

Although this symbolic transformation is remarkable, it is not made without warning. The multi-ethnic character of the believers has been established in the earlier parts of Revelation. In Rev. 10:11 and 14:6, the nations are the focus of John's prophesying, and the target audience of the flying angel's evangelistic proclamation. A call to "every nation and tribe and tongue and people" to worship God, at the very least indicates the possibility of conversion. Indeed, the fact that the believers are described repeatedly using a similar<sup>1193</sup> formula (Rev. 5:9; 7:9) demonstrates that John always expected the believers to represent many different nations. This was certainly the reality of the congregations he served.

John's audience was multi-ethnic churches in Asia Minor. Paul worked extensively in Asia Minor about half a century before the writing of Revelation. Together with his associates Aquilla and Priscilla, they established the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-19:1). In Colossians, Paul is also associated with the church in Laodicea to whom he sent an epistle that is now lost (see Col. 4:16). Paul's practice seems to have been to preach to the Jewish community first.<sup>1194</sup>

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<sup>1191</sup> There is some weak evidence for such a reading, most of which comes from Latin versions and the Textus Receptus. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1199. It is possible that the Latin word *ligno* for tree was changed to *libro* for book.

<sup>1192</sup> Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols," 126.

<sup>1193</sup> John refers to the nations with a fourfold formula seven times in Revelation (Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) but each time he follows a different sequence. In addition, Rev. 10:11 omits tribes and includes kings, and Rev. 17:15 replaces tribes with crowds.

<sup>1194</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 578.

As a result, many of his converts were probably Jews. There is abundant evidence that all the seven churches of Revelation included Jewish members.<sup>1195</sup> In addition, since Paul also directed his missionary efforts to the gentiles (Rom. 1:5,) the churches he established combined both Jews and gentiles.<sup>1196</sup>

Revelation refers to Jewish communities at least in Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:9; 3:9). These Jews were probably not from Palestine but rather from local Jewish communities.<sup>1197</sup> Additionally, gentiles were also clearly part of the church. Koester points out that when “Revelation says that Jesus redeems people of every tribe and nation, this perspective fits a context in which the Christian community included people from various backgrounds (Rev. 5:9; 7:9).”<sup>1198</sup> Those whom the Jews would describe as gentiles in Asia Minor “would have defined themselves as ‘Greeks’, ‘Romans’, ‘Galatians’, ‘Cappadocians’ and members of various other ethnic populations.”<sup>1199</sup> The multi-ethnic character of the church led to several problems.

The first Christians worshipped regularly at the temple (Acts 2:46).<sup>1200</sup> When the demographic of the church changed, and gentile proselytes were added to their numbers, worshipping at the temple was severely restricted for many of them. The court of the gentiles was separated by a wall on which an inscription prohibited access of foreigners to the court of Israel on penalty of death.<sup>1201</sup> The author of the epistle to the Ephesians probably alludes to this barrier when he claims that Christ destroyed the dividing wall (τὸ μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ λύσας, Eph. 2:14).<sup>1202</sup> It is unlikely that many gentile Christians from the seven churches went to worship at the temple, especially if Revelation was written more than twenty years after the temple’s destruction. But if Ephesians alludes to that discrimination in Eph. 2:14, then it is likely that the problem had somehow affected the gentile Christians of churches in Asia Minor a generation earlier.

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<sup>1195</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 145.

<sup>1196</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 53.

<sup>1197</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 88.

<sup>1198</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 88.

<sup>1199</sup> Christopher D. Stanley, “‘Neither Jew Nor Greek’: Ethnic Conflict in Graeco-Roman Society,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 19, no. 64 (April 1, 1997): 105.

<sup>1200</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 153.

<sup>1201</sup> Sanders, *Judaism*, 61.

<sup>1202</sup> John Muddiman and John Burton, eds., *The Pauline Epistles*, The Oxford Bible Commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 177.

A more relevant problem for some of the gentile audience of Revelation may have been exclusion from the synagogues. The first church worshipped together with Jews in synagogues. Hemer, who researched the situation of the church in Smyrna, claims with confidence that the church was established there around 52-55 AD if not earlier.<sup>1203</sup> Based on Ignatius's epistle to Smyrna that was addressed to both Jews and gentiles (εἰς τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ πιστοὺς αὐτοῦ, εἴτε ἐν Ἰουδαίοις εἴτε ἐν ἔθνεσιν, *Ad. Smyrn* 1:2),<sup>1204</sup> Hemer supposes that many Jews were converted to Christianity.<sup>1205</sup> This undoubtedly resulted in animosity and bitterness from the Jewish community. In addition, "synagogue members at Smyrna presumably considered opposition to the church to be consistent with Israel's tradition, since they thought that Jesus' followers had departed from the tradition by making elevated claims about Jesus."<sup>1206</sup> This hostility could manifest itself in the Christians being rejected and excluded from the synagogue,<sup>1207</sup> suggesting that Jewish opposition "meant that Christians would no longer enjoy the protection and tolerance the Romans" afforded the Jews.<sup>1208</sup> Once again, the issue is the same. Conflict arising from racial distinctions resulted in bitter controversy, rejection, and exclusion. According to John, God's final solution to the problem in the new world is that the gentiles who were restricted in their access to God and the temple or denied worship in the synagogues are now free to enter God's most holy place (Rev. 21:24-26).

Revelation does not provide much information about the background of its readers and their possible ethnic and racial disputes with Judaism. However, the only two references to Jews relate to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:9; 3:9) and support the image we just saw. In both cases, Jews are labelled as nominal Jews and as the "synagogue of Satan" (ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ... συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ, Rev. 2:9). The most natural and most widely held interpretation of this text is that the church was in some sort of "conflict with the Jewish

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<sup>1203</sup> Hemer, *The Letters*, 11:66.

<sup>1204</sup> According to Schoedel "Ignatius (or his source) has in mind primarily the historical reality of the universal church that represents in its inclusion of Jews and gentiles the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecies." William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, ed. Helmut Koester, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 223-24. The Greek text may also be understood as referring to Christians living among Jewish or gentile populations. This interpretation too suggests close proximity between the Christian and the Jewish communities.

<sup>1205</sup> See also Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 1:57.

<sup>1206</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 275.

<sup>1207</sup> That was probably the problem at Philadelphia, Koester, *Revelation*, 278.

<sup>1208</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 129; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 6-7. See also Philip L. Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews: The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 52.



communities” of these cities.<sup>1209</sup> The Jews of Smyrna are accused of blasphemy against the church, whereas no specific offence is mentioned in the case of Philadelphia. Blasphemy (βλασφημία) in Rev. 2:9 probably suggests slanderous accusations against the church by the Jewish population of Smyrna.<sup>1210</sup> Examples of such slander (βλασφημία) by Jews against Paul are found in Acts 13:45; 18:6 and indicate the frequent friction between these communities.<sup>1211</sup>

In Philadelphia, no specific accusation is levelled against the Jewish community. They are accused of lying (ψεύδονται, Rev. 3:9), which probably means their claim to Judaism that the author wants to dispute. A possible clue as to the nature of this conflict may be found in the first promise Christ gives to Philadelphia. The metaphor of the open door used here can be understood in several ways.<sup>1212</sup> Some see it as referring to missionary prospects.<sup>1213</sup> They assume the text refers to witnessing opportunities for the unbelieving Jews in the community. Although Paul has used the open door metaphor in this way (see 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; cf. Col. 4:3), Sweet points out that the conclusion of the passage is “Christian vindication, not Jewish conversion.”<sup>1214</sup>

The alternative way to understand the metaphor of the open door in Rev. 3:9 is that it denotes access to God.<sup>1215</sup> Rowland argues that the open door recalls the closed door of the Laodicean church in Rev. 3:20 and the open door in heaven in Rev. 4:1.<sup>1216</sup> Just as John was given access to the heavenly worship of Rev. 4-5, Christ promises unlimited and uninhibited access to God to the Philadelphian church. The implication is that the believers of Philadelphia may have been “shut out of the local synagogue, but they will have a place in God’s temple.”<sup>1217</sup> The reward of the Philadelphian church appears to address the problem of separation from God instigated by the Jewish community. The clear allusions in Rev. 3:9 to Isa. 60:14<sup>1218</sup> relates the passage to the pilgrimage of the nations to the new Jerusalem that also contain clear verbal and

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<sup>1209</sup> Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 51.

<sup>1210</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 92.

<sup>1211</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 162.

<sup>1212</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 415. In addition to the two ways the metaphor is usually interpreted (and will be dealt in more detail) Ford cites the possibility that the open door was a reference to the “advantageous position of Philadelphia” as an “avenue for Greek culture” or as “entering into a mystic state.”

<sup>1213</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 286; Caird, *The Revelation*, 53.

<sup>1214</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 102.

<sup>1215</sup> Kiddle and Ross, *The Revelation of St. John*, 49.

<sup>1216</sup> Rowland, *Revelation*, 584.

<sup>1217</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 328. Mayo, *Those Who Call Themselves Jews*, 69.

<sup>1218</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 288; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 118; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 237.

thematic parallels to Isa. 60:3, 5, 11.<sup>1219</sup> This suggests to the reader an eschatological interpretation of the promise.<sup>1220</sup> However, no such fulfilment is portrayed on the new earth (i.e., Jews bowing down to gentiles). It would have been inappropriate to include such an incident in the description of a city where all racial barriers have been removed and God's healing has been prescribed (Rev. 22:2).<sup>1221</sup> Instead, the vindication of the Philadelphian community, predicted in Rev. 3:9, is fulfilled in the pilgrimage of the nations through the open doors of the new Jerusalem. As we observed earlier, the pilgrimage cannot imply subservience, salvation, or joining God's people. The phrase τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν (Rev. 21:26) in Revelation always denotes worship, not the giving of monetary tribute.<sup>1222</sup> The pilgrimage cannot denote salvation either since John mentions the period prior to the second coming as the time for repentance and salvation.<sup>1223</sup> The pilgrimage then portrays the final vindication of the gentile believers as they receive the reward of unlimited access to God.

Ethnic barriers and customs among the early Christians often caused friction and controversy. The major way by which the early church—at least those who viewed the gentiles positively—addressed these barriers was to suggest that those who join Christianity essentially joined a new race. Buell claims “that many ancient Christians employed ethnic reasoning in the process of defining themselves.”<sup>1224</sup> First Peter 2:9 addresses the believers as a “holy nation” (ἔθνος ἅγιον), implying that the believers now have a new national identity. Likewise, Paul's declaration in Gal. 3:28 “there is neither Jew nor Greek...” while at first sight seems to abolish national identity and ethnicity markers, was used essentially to define Christians as “members of a people” who cross boundaries from “membership in one race to another.”<sup>1225</sup> By creating this new national identity for the new converts, the church allowed a construct that would at least in theory remove the barriers dividing its members.

At the beginning, Revelation seems to follow a similar course. The believers are made into a kingdom (Rev. 1:6), and although they are redeemed out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation, they are formed into *one* kingdom (βασιλείαν, Rev. 5:10). In Rev. 7:9, the believers,

<sup>1219</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1094; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1170; Koester, *Revelation*, 822.

<sup>1220</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 118.

<sup>1221</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 604-5.

<sup>1222</sup> See chapter 9.3.2.

<sup>1223</sup> See chapter 9.3.1.

<sup>1224</sup> Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 166.

<sup>1225</sup> Buell, *Why This New Race*, 139.

though coming from all nations and tribes, peoples and tongues, once again form *one* crowd (ἕχλος). This imagery is nearly identical to the Christian rhetoric Buell examines, which understands Christianity in ethnic terms, forming a new race. A heterogeneous group of people from different backgrounds form *one* new kingdom. The metaphor of the melting pot, that has been used to describe the integration of immigrants to the United States, probably illustrates this model best.<sup>1226</sup>

However, the imagery of the final chapters of Revelation is starkly different. In Rev. 21-22, the ethnic identity of the believers is not bulldozed into one group. The believers are not one people but many peoples (λαοί, Rev. 21:3). No one holy nation inhabits God's new world but many nations (ἔθνη, Rev. 21:24) who constantly visit God's temple city to worship him. The modern metaphors of a tossed salad (where the salad ingredients do not change when they are together but retain their individuality) or a mosaic describe this eschatological model better. John apparently envisions ethnic diversity in the new earth.

## 9.6 The kings of the earth

One of the most in-depth studies on the "kings of the earth" in Revelation has been done by Herms. He finds that the phrase is a well-established idiom in the HB and its meaning evolved with the passing of time. Herms identifies three basic uses of the phrase. The earliest and most narrow sense is found in the context of the conquest of Canaan where the phrase kings of the land/earth refers to the indigenous rulers who were driven out as Israel settled in (Josh. 12:1,7).<sup>1227</sup> These rulers were not well regarded, and the phrase is often describes them in an unfavourable light.

The phrase reappears at the height of the Solomonic rule and influence upon the surrounding nations (1 Kgs. 10:23-24),<sup>1228</sup> which was considered to be the fulfilment of God's promise to David. According to Herms, when Solomon failed these "traditions became expressions of future hope for the Israelite nation and restoration of the Davidic line (Ps. 72:8-11; 89:27)." With the passing of Solomon and the division of the kingdom, these traditions

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<sup>1226</sup> The metaphor was popularized by Israel Zangwill's play *The melting pot*. Allison Skerrett, "Racializing Educational Change: Melting Pot and Mosaic Influences on Educational Policy and Practice," *Journal of Educational Change* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 263, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-008-9071-0>.

<sup>1227</sup> Herms, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 199.

<sup>1228</sup> Herms, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 199-200.

became symbols that found their fulfilment in messianic expectations.<sup>1229</sup> Unlike the first use of the term kings of the earth, the second does not necessarily carry derogatory connotations. In fact, on occasion the HB applies the title “ruler of the kings of the earth” even to gentile monarchs who appear to have received their pre-eminence among the rest of the world’s rulers owing to God’s blessing or permission. Examples include Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Dan. 2:37, 47; 3:2; 4:37)<sup>1230</sup> and Cyrus of Persia (Isa. 45:1).<sup>1231</sup> Cyrus is even called God’s anointed (Isa. 45:1).<sup>1232</sup> The primary issue in this use of the idiom is a “king’s pre-eminent status and nations’ subservience to his ultimate authority.”<sup>1233</sup> Such use does not pass any judgement, positive or negative, regarding the kings of the earth, suggesting merely that they are subservient to the high king’s ultimate authority.

The third stage in the evolution of the idiom, according to Herms, reflects the time at which Israel’s monarchy failed and the exile ensued. The prophets sought to explain the events underlying the theme of Israel’s God as king over the kingdoms of the world. At the same time, they tried to highlight the future vindication of Israel as his people through the exaltation of the Davidic king who would be God’s earthly representative.<sup>1234</sup> It was assumed that the nations would resist or rebel against this king but ultimately fail. At the end, God will prove himself the ultimate God of all creation and Israel will be vindicated. The nations may play a significant role here, but this is secondary to these primary themes.<sup>1235</sup> The perspective of the nations and their kings is mainly pejorative, but not always.<sup>1236</sup> Herms suggests that contextual analysis is

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<sup>1229</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 200.

<sup>1230</sup> The Dan. 3:2; 4:37 references are from the LXX translation. The phrase the LXX uses is “*βασιλεὺς βασιλέων*”. Dan 2:47 uses the phrase “*κύριος τῶν βασιλέων*” but the subject of the clause is God, not Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>1231</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 200.

<sup>1232</sup> Cyrus is a messianic figure in Isaiah and Hanson points out that the Second Isaiah vision “differs in important respects from this popular view.” Not least of these is that the political restoration of Israel was to come to pass not through the activities of a local messiah “but though the agency of a pagan king.” Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, 165. However, the chronology of the use of this phrase fits better the period after the failure of the monarchy, which is the third stage in the evolution of the idiom according to Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 201.

<sup>1233</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 201.

<sup>1234</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 201.

<sup>1235</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 202. He cites the following scriptural examples: Ps. 2:1-2, 9-10; 47:3-9 [46:3-9 LXX]; 68:30-33 [67:30-33 LXX]; 102:15 [101:16 LXX]; 138:4-5 [137:4-5 LXX]; 148:7-14; Isa. 14:9; 24:21; 40:22-23; 49:23; Ezek. 27:33.

<sup>1236</sup> The setting is essentially Ps. 2 and the question is the response of the nations to the exhortations in Ps. 2:10-12. In some instances, the nations/kings are expected to praise God (e.g., Ps. 47:9 [46:9 LXX]) whereas in others the rulers are reduced to nothing and are punished (e.g., Isa. 24:21; 40:23).

necessary to determine the rhetorical function of these texts.<sup>1237</sup> The “political subjugation” or the “reverential deference” of the kings to God and Israel served the theological purpose of recognising God as the rightful recipient of all honour. Significantly, the pilgrimage of the kings may suggest a genuine conversion but does not require it.<sup>1238</sup> This third use of the phrase kings of the earth is clearly related to the interests of John and possibly the second. The main difference between the second and third is that the former is grounded in historical reality, or hopes for the materialization of such a reality in history (like the recognition of Israel’s monarchy), whereas the latter had deeper theological implications (attributing due honour to God) and addressed concerns typically found in apocalypticism and the eschaton.

Perhaps Herms’ greatest contribution is in the literary-narrative function of the expression kings of the earth in Revelation. Herms notes that whenever the phrase appears it links these human “rulers with some claim to ultimate authority-either that of Christ (Rev. 1:5; 6:15; 16:12-16; 17:14; 19:15-19; 21:24) or of Babylon (Rev. 17:2. 18; 18:3, 9).”<sup>1239</sup> According to Herms, this means that although these rulers are subject to Christ’s authority, they appear to line up with the demonic forces and antagonize God and his people. He claims that the overall function is “the broader affirmation of the scope and recognition of the universal kingship of God and Christ.”<sup>1240</sup> In this sense, Herms’s view is that John is not describing an objective reality, but that the function of the nations and the kings in the narrative serves “rhetorical and hortatory” purposes.<sup>1241</sup>

One valuable observation by Herms is that apart from the first and the last references to the kings (Rev. 1:5; 21:24), which are semantically distinct from the rest, all other uses of the expression are pejorative.<sup>1242</sup> The first reference in Rev. 1:5 is part of a threefold title of Christ who is described as the “faithful witness”, “the first born of the dead” and “the ruler of the kings of the earth”.<sup>1243</sup> The last allusion is to the kings bringing their glory into the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24). These two passages do not refer to the kings in a derogatory manner. In addition,

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<sup>1237</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 202.

<sup>1238</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 202.

<sup>1239</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 205.

<sup>1240</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 205-6. Herms however does not explain how the “recognition of the universal kingship of God and Christ” varies from the idea of “the sovereignty of Israel’s God as King over all the kingdoms” which he consigns to the third stage of the evolution. Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 201.

<sup>1241</sup> McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, 14.

<sup>1242</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 206.

<sup>1243</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 70.

Hermes remarks that the remaining passages sandwiched between the first and the last reference to the kings are in the context of various depictions of the last judgement.<sup>1244</sup> Hermes concludes rightly that from a literary and narrative perspective the two non-pejorative references to the kings at the beginning and end of Revelation form “an inclusio linguistically and conceptually.”<sup>1245</sup>

This study has concentrated on the nations and their function in the narrative trajectory of Revelation from chs. 19 - 22. It was concluded that all references to the nations examined in chs. 19-20 are derogatory.<sup>1246</sup> The nations appear unrepentant and no chances for their repentance are offered. A closer look at the kings yields similar results. In Rev. 6:15, the kings of the earth alongside other rulers, common free people and even slaves, seek to hide in the earth to avoid the wrath of the Lamb (Rev. 6:16). The image is that of a comprehensive judgement “irrespective of political, economic or social status.”<sup>1247</sup> Next, in Rev. 16:12-16, the kings of the inhabited world (βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης),<sup>1248</sup> a term related to the kings of the earth, are deceived by the three frog-like spirits and engage in a war against God almighty. John’s image is universal. Not merely one region of the world but all the worldly kings gather to fight against God under demonic influence.<sup>1249</sup>

The “kings” reappear five more times in judgement scenes, in Rev. 17:2, 18; 18:3, 9-10; 19:19. In Rev. 17:2, the kings fornicated with Babylon. The Hebrew prophets used prostitution as a metaphor for economic and political alliances between kingdoms (Isa. 23:17).<sup>1250</sup> In addition, the notion of prostitution was used in the HB to describe people’s infidelity towards God, and their return to idolatry (e.g., Lev. 17:7).<sup>1251</sup> Prostitution as an illicit relationship suggests unfaithfulness to one’s rightful spouse. In this sense, the implication for the kings who fornicate with Babylon is that the rightful relationship of these kings is with God. The association of this theme with Rev. 1:5 is inevitable. The kings who ought to have been under the rulership of Christ (Rev. 1:5) have fornicated with Babylon. This fornication between

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<sup>1244</sup> Hermes, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 210.

<sup>1245</sup> Hermes, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 210-11.

<sup>1246</sup> A possible exception is Rev. 20:3, a passage which does not make a qualitative reference to the nations.

<sup>1247</sup> Hermes, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 219.

<sup>1248</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 834; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 239; Osborne, *Revelation*, 592.

<sup>1249</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 834; Hermes, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 223.

<sup>1250</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 672.

<sup>1251</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 930.

the kings and Babylon is the reason for her judgement, which is stated in nearly identical but inverted terms in Rev. 18:3.<sup>1252</sup>

John includes two related motifs among the images of prostitution between the kings and Babylon. The first is the alliance of ten kings with the beast to fight against the Lamb. This war is doomed to failure since the Lamb “is Lord of lords and King of kings” (κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, Rev. 17:14). The second motif contrasts the first directly. In Rev. 17:16, the ten horns (previously identified as ten kings; see Rev. 17:12) will hate Babylon and make her desolate (Rev. 17:16). This revolt against Babylon, however, cannot be taken as a sign of their repentance because these kings still hand their power over to the beast (Rev. 17:17).<sup>1253</sup>

John does not speak of the repentance of the kings of the earth even during their lament over the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:9. The laments and tears of these kings are not tears of repentance. They are not sorry and remorseful over their behaviour but cry for Babylon (ἐπ’ αὐτήν, Rev. 18:9).<sup>1254</sup> Just as the merchants cry and mourn for her (ἐπ’ αὐτήν, Rev. 18:11) because they can draw no further economic benefit by trading with her, the kings too are in mourning because Babylon that helped them live in luxury is burning. In this sense, the mourning reflects the pain of their own personal loss.<sup>1255</sup> The irony is clear: even those who cry for Babylon, do this for their own sakes, they never actually loved her.

The last reference to the kings of the earth in the old world setting is in Rev. 19:19. As noted in previous chapters, the description of the battle is probably a retelling of the battle in Rev. 16:14 where the kings of the inhabited world were gathered to fight the almighty God.<sup>1256</sup> In Rev. 19:17-21, the kings are defeated in a battle whose outcome was forecast from the start (see Rev. 19:17-18). Both the motif of allying themselves with the beast (Rev. 19:19) and that of gathering for war against the Divine Warrior casts the kings in a negative light. The universal slaughter that ensues from the battle leaves no room for a positive understanding of these kings.

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<sup>1252</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 225.

<sup>1253</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 680.

<sup>1254</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 717.

<sup>1255</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 239.

<sup>1256</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 967; Osborne, *Revelation*, 592, 713.

Hermes' conclusion that the use of "kings of the earth" in Rev. 17:1-19:21 is consistently negative is certainly sound.<sup>1257</sup>

The motif changes radically in Rev. 21:24-26. The context of this last reference to the 'kings of the earth' is not judgement, but the rewards and the blessings of the new Jerusalem. Several scholars have noted that the description of the new Jerusalem represents a climactic point in which "recurring themes" of Revelation are finally resolved,<sup>1258</sup> especially those mentioned in the letters to the seven churches.<sup>1259</sup> The depiction of the kings of the earth bringing their glory and honour into the new Jerusalem is strongly dissonant with the previous judgement against the kings.

The problem is essentially the same as we encountered with the nations. This is understandable since the "kings of the earth" appear to be "synonymous with the 'nations' as revealed in the parallel couplets in 18:3 and 21:24."<sup>1260</sup> The problem has been handled largely in the same way.<sup>1261</sup> Some scholars assume that the author simply merged apocalyptic traditions without anticipating the logical inconsistency. One Jewish eschatological motif was that the nations and the kings making this pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem was so integral to these traditions that John thought it necessary to include it here.<sup>1262</sup> Others assume that later redactors distorted John's consistently negative view of the kings by misplacing his narrative.<sup>1263</sup> Yet another group of scholars understand this last appearance of the kings as part of John's plan to infer that a universal moment of conversion at the end takes place.<sup>1264</sup> Last, some scholars understand the kings as some of the believers and explain the inconsistency as a part of a symbolic transformation.<sup>1265</sup>

Resolving the problem requires us to understand that John's descriptions of Babylon and new Jerusalem are delivered in parallel and antithetical terms.<sup>1266</sup> Both cities are portrayed

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<sup>1257</sup> Hermes, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 236. Hermes reached a similar conclusion for the previous references, except for Rev. 1:5.

<sup>1258</sup> Hermes, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 237.

<sup>1259</sup> Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols," 124.

<sup>1260</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1171; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 257.

<sup>1261</sup> The subsequent list follows Hermes' order from Hermes, "An Apocalypse for the Church," 238-39.

<sup>1262</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1172.

<sup>1263</sup> Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1920, 2:146, 172-73.

<sup>1264</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 279.

<sup>1265</sup> Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols," 106-26.

<sup>1266</sup> Giblin, "Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22," 487-504; Deutsch, "Transformation of Symbols," 123; Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1143-46.



as women. Babylon is a prostitute (Rev. 17:1,5), the new Jerusalem a pure bride (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:2). Babylon will become the dwelling-place of demons (Rev. 18:2), the new Jerusalem will become the dwelling-place of God (Rev. 21:3). The kings of the earth play a key role in the description of both cities. They collaborated with Babylon (Rev. 17:2), allied with the beast against the Lamb (Rev. 17:13), and shared in her economic excess (Rev. 18:9). In the new world, the kings offer their glory and honour to the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:24-26), a sign of their homage and worship of God.<sup>1267</sup> Herms observes that the behaviour of the kings “reflects an antithetical and moral predisposition to that with which they were characterized in the vision of Babylon.”<sup>1268</sup> The dissonance between the kings and the nations of the old world with the kings and the nations of the new world is not therefore the problem, it is the point. John uses the same designation “kings of the earth” to underline the contrast. This suggestion in turn raises the question of whether the kings of the earth is a referent for actual kings.

Herms answers this question in the negative. He understands the kings of earth both in Rev. 1:5 and 21:24-26 as fashioned according to what he calls Solomonic traditions. Herms argues that the glory and honour (τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν, Rev. 21:26) that the kings offer to the new Jerusalem is best understood as tributary tax exacted by Solomon from his client kings (see 1Kgs. 4:34 [5:14 LXX]). Herms draws this conclusion from his study of the underlying text in Isa. 60 and the allusions to the kings offering material wealth to Israel.<sup>1269</sup> In addition, Herms supports his claim by examining the semantic meaning of the words δόξα and τιμή. He concludes that δόξα can refer to splendour or grandeur and τιμή to price or value and payment.

The problem with this part of Herms’ interpretation is that he fails to derive the meaning of the terms δόξα and τιμή from their immediate context in Revelation, relying instead on the context of Isaiah and the semantic domain of these words. John depends on Isaiah for his imagery, but this does not mean that he slavishly follows the HB prophet. In fact, Beale points out that nowhere does Isa. 60-61 say that the kings and nations will bring their “glory” (δόξα) or “honour” (τιμή).<sup>1270</sup> The words δόξα and τιμή are consistently found in Revelation in the context of praise and worship of God (Rev. 4:9; 11; 5:12-13; 7:12)<sup>1271</sup> and “‘giving glory’ is an

<sup>1267</sup> See heading 9.3.2 in this chapter.

<sup>1268</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 240.

<sup>1269</sup> Herms, “An Apocalypse for the Church,” 244-45. For instance, Isa. 60:16 where Israel is promised to eat the riches of kings (πλοῦτον βασιλέων φάγεσαι).

<sup>1270</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1094.

<sup>1271</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1095; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 316; Koester, *Revelation*, 822.

act of worship, which honours the Creator and the Lamb (Rev. 4:9, 11; 5:12, 13; 7:12; 11:13; 14:7; 19:1-7).<sup>1272</sup> Osborne suggests that John replaced the notion of “military victory and plunder” found in Isa. 60 with an image centred on conversion and worship.<sup>1273</sup> Such usage may imply that the kings are more than a literary device intended to build up the image of Christ as “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5) according to the Solomonic tradition. It also reflects the third stage of the expression’s use, affirming both the sovereignty of God and Christ as ruler over all the kingdoms (Rev. 1:5) and the vindication of God’s people.

Another observation on the phrase kings of the earth is that the kings are modified by the genitive “of the earth” (τῆς γῆς). This genitive offers more than their mere geographical location. It is similar to the phrase “the inhabitants of the earth” (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), which is consistently negative in Revelation.<sup>1274</sup> The same can be said for the related expression “the earth and those who inhabit it” (τὴν γῆν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ κατοικοῦντας, Rev. 13:12). This negativity towards the inhabitants of the earth is best shown when the expression is compared to the dwellers in heaven.<sup>1275</sup> Rev. 12:12 calls on the heavens and those who dwell in them (οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες) to rejoice. Those who dwell in heaven (τοὺς ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σκηνοῦντας, Rev. 13:6) are also the object of the sea beast’s attack. Thus, those who inhabit the earth are consistently evil in Revelation, whereas those who dwell in the heavens are good. The verb κατοικέω (to inhabit) is also contrasted with the verb σκηνόω (to dwell in a tent). The latter probably carries positive connotations because God’s dwelling in Revelation is portrayed as a tent (ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev. 21:3). Alternatively, during the wandering in the wilderness God’s people dwelt in tents which also explains why the feast of booths was instituted (Lev. 23:42-43).<sup>1276</sup> The conclusion is that the genitive “of the earth” qualifies both those who dwell in it and the kings who rule it. However, in Rev. 21:24-26 a new earth has been created. It is not the old earth that qualifies the kings but the new one. In this new earth, God’s tent, the place alluded to specifically and viewed positively in Rev. 12:12; 13:6, is now located on the new earth (Rev.

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<sup>1272</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 833.

<sup>1273</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 763. Osborne finds evidence for this conversion in Rev. 11:13; 14:7; 16:9.

<sup>1274</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 239; Koester, *Revelation*, 326.

<sup>1275</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 240.

<sup>1276</sup> The passage uses the noun σκηνή and for dwelling the verbs κατοικέω (Lev. 23:42) and κατοικίζω (ἐν σκηναῖς κατώκισα τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ, I housed the sons of Israel in tents Lev. 23:43). Thus both words (σκηνή, κατοικέω) are used in Lev. 23:42-43.

21:3). In this new world, heaven and earth had been “united into a larger reality.”<sup>1277</sup> This observation explains the new realities that have allowed John to transform his symbol.<sup>1278</sup>

In the previous discussion on the nations we noted that God’s people in the new world are portrayed as his peoples (λαοί). We concluded that the believing community that was transferred into heaven for the millennium and then relocated back to earth was transformed into the symbol of the nations that worship God in the new Jerusalem. Among the promises given to the believing community is that they would be made a kingdom and that they will reign on earth (Rev. 5:10).<sup>1279</sup> The promise of Rev. 5:10 applies to all the redeemed, those purchased for God by the Lamb’s blood (ἡγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματί σου, Rev. 5:9).<sup>1280</sup> Clearly not all believers can be kings in one kingdom (see Rev. 1:6 ἐποίησεν ἡμᾶς βασιλείαν). The believers are a kingdom because “they will fill the role of kings along with the messianic King.”<sup>1281</sup> The believers are thus called kings in Revelation because they will share his throne together with Christ (Rev. 3:21) and enjoy “the benefits of Christ’s rule.”<sup>1282</sup> Therefore, believers in Revelation are not kings in their own right ruling their own kingdoms, since God will establish only one kingdom. They simply share the benefits of royalty that derive from Christ’s rule. Such a use of the word kings fits with John’s previous use of the word in Revelation.<sup>1283</sup>

In the newly created world, we saw that God’s people are designated as nations (Rev. 21:3, 24). We also noted that the pilgrimage to the temple is framed so as to suggest worship. John is not endeavouring to differentiate among the saved. By describing the pilgrimage of the nations and the kings of the earth, John transforms a familiar image of worship to include the image of God’s absolute sovereignty on the new earth.

John is not afraid to stretch the meaning of words, patterns or even grammar rules to fit his purposes. Symbols are tools at his disposal to deliver his message. The kings of the earth began as a token of Christ’s power (Rev. 1:5). During the judgement scenes and while John described the unfolding of the rebellion of Satan, the beast and his followers, the kings allied

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<sup>1277</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 730.

<sup>1278</sup> Deutsch, “Transformation of Symbols,” 106-26.

<sup>1279</sup> From the context, it seems that the future tense βασιλεύουσιν is to be preferred to the present βασιλεύουσι found in some manuscripts, as in Rev. 5:10. So Metzger, *A Textual Commentary*, 738; Koester, *Revelation*, 380-81.

<sup>1280</sup> Caird, *The Revelation*, 77.

<sup>1281</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 27.

<sup>1282</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 389.

<sup>1283</sup> Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 371-72; Koester, *Revelation*, 701.

with powers that were against God and were destroyed. After the destruction of sin and evil, God re-creates the earth and the heavens. The kings of the earth are no longer a symbol conditioned by the old earth and sin. They become a token of God's authority over the whole new earth and a proof of its complete renewal.

## 10. Conclusion

This exegetical study endeavoured to resolve what seems inconsistent portrayals of the fates of the nations in the book of Revelation. Revelation describes two distinct and seemingly incompatible fates for the nations, one involving their destruction in battle and another their pilgrimage to the new Jerusalem. The exegesis of Rev. 19 and 20 verified that the nations are indeed destroyed, first in battle with the Divine Warrior in Rev. 19:11-21, and then after the millennium by fire from heaven in Rev. 20:9.<sup>1284</sup> It was shown that John used HB imagery that was already militant in its nature and intensified it. It was also pointed out that John universalized the localized language of the prophets.<sup>1285</sup>

Another crucial inference from the exegesis of Rev. 19-20 was that John's language and narrative flow are not as inconsistent as some may suppose. For instance, John does not first have the nations killed, and then simply assume their existence. He includes indications of a future resurrection for the wicked (Rev. 20:5), and when the time of the resurrection is fulfilled (after the fulfilment of the thousand years, Rev. 20:5, 7) he reintroduces the nations in language that suggests their coming from the underworld.<sup>1286</sup> This demonstrates two issues. First, John is concerned with the coherence of his narrative. He does not arbitrarily bring in characters or groups he has previously eliminated. Second, it appears that the universalizing character of John's language is not merely a stylistic feature of his writings. He does not describe the mass destruction of the world when in effect he does not mean it. On the contrary, when he describes the death of all nations, he assumes that these nations remained dead and introduces them again only after a resurrection.

It was also argued that John described the Parousia as an event that dissolved creation and returned the earth to a chaotic primordial state.<sup>1287</sup> This chaotic state reinforces the notion that the earth during the millennium is void of human life and became Satan's prison. It means that no human nations live on earth during the millennium and as a result there is no chance for anyone to repent. Indeed, no such record of the nations' repentance exists, not even a call for such repentance. It must be concluded that John's narrative leaves no room for the nations to repent during the time of the millennium.

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<sup>1284</sup> See chapter 3 and chapter 7.

<sup>1285</sup> See chapter 3.2.

<sup>1286</sup> See chapter 7.2.

<sup>1287</sup> See chapter 5.

A similar conclusion can be derived from the judgement before the white throne.<sup>1288</sup> It was argued that the image of judgement in Rev. 20:11-15 is a recapitulation of the war after the millennium. This time God administers judgement to individuals who appear before his throne. Once again, these individuals face judgement after a resurrection (Rev. 20:13 cf. Rev. 20:5, 8) and the punishment is fiery (Rev. 20:15 cf. Rev. 20:9). No opportunities for repentance are mentioned during the judgement and in fact no positive outcome for the judgement of any individual is recorded. Such accounts leave no possibility of the nations' repentance open.

Furthermore, the study of the terms "lake of fire" and "second death" demonstrated that these phrases were probably derived from Egyptian mythology.<sup>1289</sup> It was shown that Egyptian religion was widespread in Asia Minor and the seven churches in particular. In their original context, these idioms signified a final irreversible fate. John seems to be using these terms to communicate the same message they conveyed in their original context; the fate of all those consigned to the lake of fire is irreversible. This reinforces our previous conclusion that the nations are not offered the possibility of repentance during the millennium or immediately after it.

In Rev. 21, John turns the page on the old creation and sees a new heaven and a new earth.<sup>1290</sup> The earth, the location of the final battle of Satan and the nations against the beloved city, is replaced by God's new creation, a pervasive concept in Revelation. It not only applies to one aspect of the creation but to all. Not only are the heavens created or earth only but both. The experience of life on earth undergoes such fundamental changes that even pain, suffering, and death are eradicated. What makes these utopian conditions a reality is God's dwelling in this world (Rev. 21:3). John expecting the nations (or some of them) to survive that transition into the new world without describing a basic process of their repentance or survival is incomprehensible.

Some assume that the pilgrimage of the nations to the new Jerusalem is a metaphor for their repentance. The discussion of this pilgrimage demonstrated that the march of the nations into the new Jerusalem is described by images and terms taken from the HB. Neither the prophets nor John use this image to signify repentance. While in some cases in Jewish literature the pilgrimage is evidence of the nations' subservience to Israel, John's carefully assembled

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<sup>1288</sup> See chapter 7.5.

<sup>1289</sup> See chapter 8.

<sup>1290</sup> See chapter 9.

image suggests worship and lacks any sign of the nations' servitude.<sup>1291</sup> Access to God and worship also appears to be the motif of the tree of life.

The new heavens and the new earth along with God's presence on earth radicalize the conditions of the world, allowing John to transform his symbolism. Those termed in the past a "kingdom" or "multitude" (βασιλεία, ὄχλος, Rev. 5:9; 7:9) from nations, tribes, tongues, and people are now called peoples (λαοί, Rev. 21:3) of God. This is a striking transformation not only of John's own symbolism but also of his original sources that unanimously described God's people as λαός.<sup>1292</sup> John's freedom to adapt his symbolism according to his needs argues against those who understand the pilgrimage of the nations as a remnant of John's sources that he employed uncritically. John has demonstrated repeatedly that he affords himself considerable literary independence handling source material. The way he turns λαός into λαοί is such an example.

When describing the new world, John repeatedly includes caveats that remind the reader that no one or nothing evil will be allowed in the city (Rev. 21:8; 27; 22:15). These stipulations also reject the notion of universalism since clearly some do not make it into the city. At the same time, it becomes apparent that the theory that John sets two options for the nations to choose side by side cannot be accepted. Some of the nations will choose to rebel against God and will meet their end in the lake of fire while others will choose to follow the Lamb and enter the new Jerusalem. John does not describe these fates as mutually exclusive alternatives but as realities that will come to pass.

In order to solve these problems, I have argued that the nations of Rev. 21:24-26 are the believers, a conclusion supported by the image of the tree of life. According to John, the tree of life provides twelve fruits, one per month, and the leaves of the tree are for healing the nations. The twelve fruits of the tree of life associate the nations with the number twelve, which is the number of God's people in Revelation. In addition, the notion that the leaves of the tree provide healing is a concept that John borrows directly from Ezekiel. John expands the application of the healing leaves of the tree, originally intended for the covenant people of Israel, to the nations who now represent God's own people.<sup>1293</sup> Those once rejected are now fully incorporated.

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<sup>1291</sup> See chapter 9.3.2.

<sup>1292</sup> See chapter 9.5.

<sup>1293</sup> See chapter 9.4.

Furthermore, the noun *θεραπεία* can refer to acts of spiritual service. In this case, *θεραπεία* evokes the worship of the nations in God's temple city.

Another way by which John identifies the nations with the believers is by linking them with the rewards promised to the believers elsewhere in Revelation. In the new Jerusalem, the nations are given access to the city through its open gates (Rev. 21:25) and are given access to the tree of life (Rev. 22:2). Elsewhere, the victors of the Ephesian church are given a promise to eat from the tree of life (Rev. 2:7) and those who wash their robes have the authority over the tree of life and entrance to the new Jerusalem (Rev. 22:14). John therefore gives the nations the same access and reward that are afforded only to believers elsewhere in Revelation.<sup>1294</sup>

The study of the idiom “kings the of earth” in Revelation revealed that it is often used synonymously with the nations. The problem of the kings is similar to that pertaining to the nations. Most references to the kings in Revelation are related to judgement and assume that the kings are evil. The kings, especially in the description of Babylon, are said to have fornicated with Babylon and become rich because of her. In contrast, the last reference is part of the description of the new Jerusalem and the nations led by their kings bring their honour and glory to God. It was pointed out that the new Jerusalem is described in parallel and antithetical terms to Babylon. It was also suggested that the use of the same term (i.e., kings of the earth) may be there in order to highlight that antithesis further.

Moreover, the genitive “of the earth” appears to qualify the term as in the phrase “inhabitants of the earth”. The old world, the earth, the place where Satan has been exiled to from heaven (Rev. 12:9), is defiled. However, the new earth is going to be the eternal home of God. God's tabernacle will be with his people (Rev. 21:3). Those who live in this new holy world are by definition sanctified and therefore John feels free to transform his symbol once again to refer to kings who are not evil.

These kings do not appear to serve a different purpose from the rest of the believers. From the beginning of the book, John promises all believers equal opportunities, and Christ's promise to the Laodiceans is that the victors will sit together with him on his throne (Rev. 3:21). It is unlikely that John envisioned that the nations would be ruled by a special class of believers. The image is probably designed to describe a world with no opposition to God's sovereign rule.

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<sup>1294</sup> See chapter 9.5.



The solution to the problem of the nations proposed in this study, in my view, yields a coherent narrative for the last chapters of Revelation. It does not assume a hypothetical change of heart for the nations at a time when John does not suggest such a change took place. Nor does this reading presuppose that the image of the rider on the white horse that results in bloodshed is a symbolic image of conversion. The resolution offered requires a transformation of John's symbolism. The nations that were often an image of the unbelievers who followed the beast in the last chapters of Revelation turned into an image of God's people. Two factors allow for this transformation. The first is the new heaven and earth. The world that God creates is so new that all the realities forming part of it are different. The other factor is the composition of the apocalyptic community to whom John was addressing his prophecies. They were people who were thought of as gentiles (ἐθνικοί) and faced exclusion. In God's new world, John turns the tables, presenting them as heirs or covenant people. He does so, not by stripping them of their nationalities but by celebrating their diversity. John consciously calls these nations "God's peoples" not "people". These nations, not the covenant Israel, are the recipients of the healing leaves of the tree of life. They are the ones who will see God's face and for whom the doors of the Holy City will never close. The nations entering the new Jerusalem in the final chapters is not a side show of the new earth or a meaningless remnant of the old prophecies. It is the highlight of the vindication of John's apocalyptic community.

## 11. Bibliography

Unless otherwise noted NT quotations are from the Nestle Aland 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the New Testament. The Greek text of 1 Enoch is quoted from

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